


NO MAN'S LAND

LOVIS JOSEPH VANCE

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BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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“Both men were watching Van Tuyl”
(page 31)

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NO MAN'S LAND

A Romance

BY

LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

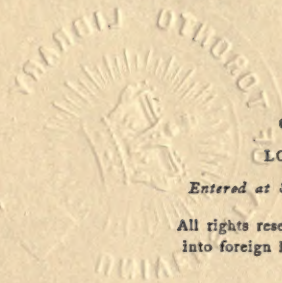


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To

WINCHELL SMITH

ILLUSTRATIONS

BOTH MEN WERE WATCHING VAN TUYL

(Page 31) *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

SHE DIDN'T KNOW HER OWN MIND WHEN HE WAS

TALKING TO HER 60

FROM HIS POSITION, COAST COULD SEE THE PRONE

BODY AND ROUND IT FOUR FIGURES 160

TOO LATE HE SAID, THAT'S ALL, GOOD NIGHT . . . 352

There is a world outside the one you know
To which for curiousness 'Ell can't compare;
It is the place where wilful missings go . . .

THE WILFUL MISSING: *Kipling*

There was neither moon nor stars—naething but a
flaught o' fire now and then, to keep the road by.

—*An old tale in* BLACKWOOD'S

I

A GENTLEMAN who, leaving his offices on lower Broadway a trifle after four, presently ensconced himself in a corner seat of a Subway express and opened before him a damp afternoon paper (with an eye for the market reports) was surprised, when the train crashed heavily into the Fourteenth Street station, to find himself afoot and making for the door: this although his intention had been to alight at Grand Central. Thus it may be, that trickster in us all, which we are accustomed vaguely to denominate the subconscious mind, directs our actions to an end predestined.

Surprised, he hesitated; and for that was rewarded by having his heels trodden by the passenger behind. This decided him, absurdly enough, and he went on and out, solacing himself with a muttered something, hardly definite, about a stroll benefiting him. So, transferring to a local train, he alighted at Twenty-third Street, climbed the stairs and proceeded briskly west, buffeted by a rowdy wind.

Striking diagonally across Madison Square Park, past the drearily jetting fountain and between arrays of empty benches scarcely beggarly (since that class

had deserted them for warmer lounging places) he turned northward on Fifth Avenue, threading the early evening throngs with a spring of impatience in his stride to distance casual competition; and received upon a mind still impressionable, for all that it had ample food for meditation and nursed a private grievance, a variety of pleasurable suggestions.

Dusk, the early violet dusk of late November, brooded over the city, blurring its harsh contours, subduing its too blatant youth, lending an illusion resembling the dim enchantment of antiquity. In the west a cloudless sunset had faded to an afterglow of amethyst which, shading insensibly into mauve, toward the zenith blended with the deep purple of the shrouded east. Against this lucent curtain bulked monstrous walls with a broken skyline, now low, now lofty, dotted here and there on high with glittering windows, below rendered brilliant by a dado of illuminated plate-glass shielding covetable wares, the whole cut at regular intervals by the gullies of cross-town streets. Northward were strung parallel lines of opalescent arc-lamps, swelling over the generous rise of Murray Hill like twin chains of luminous pearls upon a woman's bosom. Between them fluent streams of conveyances moved sedately in opposite directions, their decorum rudely mitigated by strident horns of motors chafing under discipline of mounted members of the Traffic Squad—soldierly figures statu-

esque *en silhouette* against the tinted glow. On the sidewalks a composite civilisation paraded at leisure: a concourse largely feminine. The wayfarer was conscious of alluring glimpses of sleek profiles softly lighted, of eyes whose mystery was enhanced by dusky shadows: that he breathed an atmosphere of ease and luxury with which he was on familiar terms and which he found, subjectively, pleasant, comforting with a reassurance of the stability of the social order. At another period of the day, he was aware, the thoroughfare would have told a very different tale: now as at none other, wealth usurped its freedom, dominated it, mildly arrogant. The very air, brisk and keen with frost, was none the less sensuously impregnated with this softening and tempering influence.

Discovering this fact he caught himself up smartly and lengthened a stride that had unconsciously slackened, steeling his mood with the coddling of his discontent.

Near Twenty-ninth Street he checked sharply and stood briefly debating something suggested by sight of a shop-window well known to him:

"It might save time: one may as well be sure . . ."

Turning, he descended a pair of stone steps and crossed a flagged area to a door set at one side of a window dressed with a confusion of odd, enticing things: a display that tempted the eye with the colours of the rainbow fainting under weight of years

and dust. A bell tinkled overhead as he opened and shut the door, letting himself into a deep and narrow room crowded with a heterogenous assemblage of objects that glimmered with weird splendour in a semi-gloom made visible by half a dozen electric bulbs generously spaced. In the rear, beyond a partitioning screen, shone a warmer light.

For the moment he saw no one. Advancing a few paces he halted, waiting.

In the air hung the scent of sandalwood confused with others aromatic. On the right a procession of show-cases ran the length of the room; on the left, cabinets. He had bewildering glimpses of old mirrors set in dull gilt, old paintings burning lustrous in tarnished frames, a squat Buddha tranquil in obscure desuetude, teakwood stands and tables set forth with antique porcelains and crystals, lustre ware, figurines, fans, swords and knives of half a hundred countries, candelabra of brass and silver, a rare casket of carven cinnabar like moulded flame, faded tapestries, curious vestments, garments from the East conceived in exquisite schemes of colour, Japanese prints dim with age, a case crowded with bowls and trays of unset gems, others amazingly filled with jewellery that spanned the history of the civilisations—jade and jasper, diamonds, malachite, turquoises, rubies, agates, chrysophrase, sardonyx, opals—an endless catalogue—set in gold, silver, brass, copper, steel

and iron: a rabble of treasures, huddled together with such apparent lack of system that the brain was confounded to contemplate the possibility of being called upon to select any single article from that abounding host.

From behind the screen, at the back of the shop, the proprietor appeared, soft stepping, smiling to greet a good customer of discerning taste. The latter went to meet him with a pleasant air of liking.

"Good-evening, Mr. Miller——"

"Good-evening, Mr. Coast. Something I can show you this evening?"

"The telephone, if you please." Coast laughed a little and was answered cheerfully.

"Certainly. This way."

He was conducted behind the screen, where, beneath a strong light, an assistant at a jeweller's bench sat laboriously occupied with some task of delicate artifice. He looked up as Coast entered, with a greeting cordially returned. Coast went directly to the telephone, a wall instrument, unhooked the receiver and detailed a number to Central. The proprietor disappeared into an adjoining room. An instant later Coast spoke again.

"That you, Soames? . . . This is Mr. Coast. Is Miss Katherine at home? . . . Then will you find out, please. Ask her if she has time to see me

for a few moments before dinner. . . . Very well."

There was a lengthening pause, during which the antique-dealer silently returned, his genial eye alternating between Coast and a crystal decanter he had fetched.

"Yes, Central, waiting." Coast put his hand over the transmitter and wagged a reproving head. "Going to try to poison me, Miller?"

"Just a drop of old brandy, Mr. Coast—very old, from my home in France."

Coast nodded, recalled to the telephone. "Hello, Soames. . . . Very well. Tell her I called, please. . . . No! no message, thank you. Good-bye."

As he hung up the receiver, a warning tintinnabulation sounded at the front door. Miller, busy with glasses, looked to his assistant. "See who that is, Charley," he said. The assistant slipped from his seat, switched on more light in the front of the shop, and vanished round the screen.

As he did so, Coast heard the rumble of a man's voice, followed by a woman's ringing laugh, a thought too loud.

Miller was offering him a glass. He bowed, took it and held it to his lips for a moment without tasting, inhaling the mellow bouquet of the liquor.

"That is good," he said, and sipped critically.

"The very best, Mr. Coast. There's little like it out of France."

"I'm glad I thought of imposing on your good nature."

"Why, so am I. My friends are always welcome. . . . Your health, Mr. Coast."

"And yours, Mr. Miller."

They drank ceremoniously. Coast put down an empty glass. "That," he declared from the bottom of a congratulated heart, "was delicious."

"Another drop?"

"No. Absolutely not. It would inspire me to try to buy out the shop."

Miller shook his head. "I wouldn't want to sell you anything now," he said with simple gravity. "I should rob myself."

Coast surprised the twinkle in his eye and joined the laugh. "Then I shant tempt you." He offered his hand. "Good-night, and thank you."

"Good-night, Mr. Coast."

On his way out, Coast had an indifferent glance for the customers at a show-case near the window. The woman stood with her back turned, chattering volubly to the assistant in indifferent French: a small, slight figure with arms uplifted, holding a chain of gold and imperial jade to the light. Beside her the man loomed solidly, his heavy proportions exaggerated by a fur-lined coat, his attentive pose own-

ing a trace of proprietary interest. As Coast drew near he looked up and faced about, stripping off a glove.

"Why, h'ar'ye, Coast!"

Tone and manner proclaimed the unexpected encounter of old friends. Perforce Coast took his hand, pausing, then dropped it, with a grave "Good evening, Blackstock." His distaste for the man affected him intensely, but he tried to conceal it beneath a forced banality: "Early Christmas shopping, eh?"

"Not exactly." Blackstock slurred explanations. "I've just been trying to get you on the telephone."

Coast's eyebrows underlined his surprise. "Yes?"

"Yes. Thought you might care for a hand at Bridge to-night: just a few of us at my rooms: Van Tuyl, Truax, Dundas, yourself and me. We'll cut in and out. What d'ye say?"

Coast's acceptance followed an instant's consideration. Had the invitation been extended him at any time before noon of that same day, his refusal would have been prompt if qualified by an invented engagement. Now, however, after what the day had rumoured of the man, he was inclined to grasp an opportunity to study him, to see as much of him as possible—little as he cared to see anything of him.

"What o'clock?"

"Oh, between nine and ten—any time. You know

where I hang out? We'll count on you." Blackstock beamed, his eyes shining behind thick lenses: to snare Garrett Coast was a signal conquest. An additional trace of affable effusiveness oiled his always slightly overpowering manner. Then doubt moderated it, and he had an irresolute eye for his companion.

She had turned away from the case, with an assured attitude imperative of an introduction. Coast received an impression of a very large and elaborately simple hat beneath which a great deal of hair, unquestionably no stranger to henna, framed a face whose dead white pallor effectively emphasised a full scarlet curve of lips and large eyes like pools of violet ink, that looked him up and down quite openly. He bowed to Blackstock's constrained words of presentation.

"Miss Fancher—my friend, Mr. Coast."

She nodded, giving him a small hand whose pressure was a thought too frank. "I've heard about you," she said, nodding emphatically. "Glad to know you."

"And I've enjoyed your dancing many times, from the far side of the footlights," he told her pleasantly.

"Nice of you to say that. I'm with The Rathskeller Girl now, you know. Have you seen it?"

"I'm promising myself the pleasure."

"Well, when you come, just let me know."

"I shant forget," Coast assured her vaguely. "But now I must run along. Miss Fancher—Blackstock—good-night."

He escaped to open air with a sensation of relief and perturbation oddly commingled. Instead of soothing, the brandy warmed his grievance until it turned writhing in his bosom and stung him like an adder. So that was the man! . . . He pressed forward more rapidly, but now in an introspective mood, oblivious of all that so recently had gratified him.

At Fortieth Street he pulled up on the southern corner, over across from the dull grey colonnade of the new Public Library, awaiting a break in the stream of traffic.

He had to possess himself in patience or risk his neck; carriages, cabs, coupés, cars of every description from limousine to runabout, swept past with neither haste nor cessation, lamps all bright in the wintry darkness. The west was now altogether conquered save for a narrow strip of fading emerald above the Jersey horizon, hardly to be discerned at the end of the darkling, lamp-trimmed cañon running westwards. There was a sprinkling of cold high stars in the deep, dark vault above. Women nestled glowing faces into their furs; men moved with animation, their breath puffing white. A multitude

of steel-shod hoofs beat a vivacious tempo on the asphalt, making music above the sonorous humming of motors.

Coast buttoned his top-coat over his chest and held his head high, drinking deep of the wine-sap in the air.

A policeman presently made a way for him, holding back the press of vehicles to permit a string of their counterparts to break through. Coast stepped down from the curb and in another minute would have been across, but stopped in mid-stride to hear himself named in a voice unforgettable, to him inexpressibly sweet.

Startled, he halted beneath the noses of a pair of handsome horses champing in taut-reined restraint, and glanced at random right and left. Then as again he was called—"Garrett! Garrett Coast!"—out of the corner of an eye he detected the uplifted, salutant two fingers of the driver of a town-car at halt in the outer line of north-bound traffic. In the window of the car a white glove fluttered, moth-like.

Beside the door, with a hand on the latch, he spoke through the lowered window.

"May I beg a lift, Katherine?"

"Indeed you may. Didn't I call you, Garrett?"

"Good of you. I *am* fortunate. I've been wanting to see you——"

He got in and shut the door at the moment when, by grace of the omnipotent policeman, motion became again permissible. The racking motor quieted into purring: the car slipped forward, gaining momentum. Others, a swarm, swirled round and past like noisy fireflies. He ignored them all, blessing his happy chance. Katherine Thaxter in her corner had a smile for him, dimly to be detected through the gloom wherein her face glimmered like some wan flower of the night, beautiful, fragrant, mysterious.

"Where were you going, Garrett?"

"Oh . . ." He emerged from reverie with a little start at the sound of her voice. "No place in particular. I believe I had some hazy notion of the club when you hailed me. And you? Home, of course."

"Yes. I've been shopping."

"Tired?"

"Not very. . . . Curious I should have been thinking of you just when the car stopped."

"I don't agree: it was telepathy."

"Oh, that's overworked, Garrett. Can't a commonplace coincidence be explained any other way nowadays?"

"Perhaps: but not this time. I've been thinking about you all day. Some impulse—I don't know what—moved me to walk uptown from Twenty-

third Street and delays insignificant in themselves brought me to that corner just in time. That isn't coincidence: it's——" He sought the word.

"What do you think?"

"Predestination—another name for luck."

"You're ingenious."

"Grateful, rather."

She laughed, a gentle laugh that faded in a sigh, and after a moment of anticipative silence, almost apprehensive, felt obliged to ask: "What were you thinking about me, Garrett?"

"Much the usual thing, I'm afraid——"

"Oh, Garrett!" Her voice was rueful though she laughed. "Again?"

"I'm a persistent beggar, you know, Katherine. . . . But otherwise, also: I happened to hear your name mentioned to-day . . . gossip . . . an idle rumour . . ."

He felt her eyes upon him, seriously sweet and questioning, and frowned slightly, wishing he had held his tongue, though aware that he could not have, caring the way he did.

"Why not tell me? I'm waiting, Garrett."

"Well. . . ." It was difficult: an impertinence; incredible, besides. But now that he had committed himself, he stiffened a resolve and plunged. "It was said that your engagement to this man Blackstock would be announced before long."

That out bluntly, he caught a long breath and, divided between fear and faith, sat watching her. The passing street lights touched her face and figure strangely with fitful wheeling rays, swiftly abrupted but more or less continuous, affording him broken, unsatisfactory glimpses of her, as if through the medium of a cinematograph running at low speed. He could see, however, that she was sitting straight and rigid, no longer relaxed at ease, no longer smiling, but rather with a face set away from him, its pure young profile gleaming in the half-light like ivory against the dark.

The seconds of her silence spun for him an hour of anguish.

"Katherine . . ."

She turned. "Yes?"

"Have you nothing to say?" he asked involuntarily, and at once regretted it.

"What do you wish me to say?" Her tone was dull, as if she spoke mechanically, with a mind detached.

"Either affirm or deny. You owe me that, at least."

"Do I?" She seemed surprised. "But what," she pursued, rousing, "does 'this man Blackstock'——"

"You know I don't like him, Katherine. I can't."

"But I can and do, Garrett."

There was simplicity in that, almost confessional. His fears assailed him more imperiously.

"Then it's true? Don't tell me that!"

"What does Mr. Blackstock say?"

"I haven't interviewed him, of course. It seemed too absurd——"

"Why?"

The only retort he had at command was pitifully inadequate: "Because I love you."

"Is that any reason why Mr. Blackstock should not?"

"There are reasons why you shouldn't let your name be coupled with his."

"And they are——?"

She put it crisply. His heart sank, foreseeing defeat. He veered at a tangent, evasive. "You haven't answered me. Is there any truth in this rumour?"

"Not yet."

"You mean it may be true—later?"

"It's possible," she affirmed quietly. "Mr. Blackstock has asked me to marry him; he hasn't as yet had my answer."

"Katherine! . . . You can't really—care for him?"

"I'm trying to be sure, Garrett, before I tell him so—or you."

"But—but you mustn't! . . . The thing's impossible. . . . You——"

"You'll tell me why?"

Her composure was sobering. He got himself more in hand: she was not to be moved by storming, he knew. Reason, logic, an appeal to her intelligence: she would require these of him. Yet when put to it he could not bring himself to tell what he knew of the man by hearsay, if very credibly. Personal defects, lack of breeding, and the like were all unstable objections. . . . In the end the best he could do, since some sort of an answer was essential, was to frame a halting, inconclusive: "He's not the sort. . . ."

She misinterpreted his confusion. "I know what you're thinking: that he's not a spoke in our particular social wheel; an outsider. Must I condemn him for that? Are there no right men, Garrett, but yourself and others of our 'set'? . . . I know he has his lacks; I fancy you'd call him crude, if you were candid with me. But men of his genius, his upbringing . . . Not that I concede any crudity in him; it's hardly that: he merely lacks—something—difficult to name it; not cultivation, not sensibility, but, I'd say, friends."

"He has many. . . ."

So she cared enough to fight for him! There was

bitterness, surpassing the bitterness of aloes, in that discovery.

"I mean the right kind, yourself for instance; friends to bring him out. He's quick, adaptable, of a good family—if not a wealthy one."

Coast fell back upon the one mentionable objection of which he had certain knowledge. "He's got a villainous temper."

"Friends would teach him to control it. And there are excuses for that: his sight—his eyes are in a bad way. He injured them seriously, somehow, in his work—something about the spark, I believe."

"Those wireless experiments of his?"

"Yes. He's going to do great things, Garrett."

"Late in the field."

"He leads it to-day; they all look to him. His inventions, discoveries, improvements, will make wireless as every-day a thing as the telephone. . . . I don't mean he couldn't win without friends: he's strong enough . . ."

"Men have little use for him, Katherine."

"Women have."

Coast strangled temptation. . . . "He has magnetism."

"That and strength, ambition, enthusiasm. He's worth being a friend to. I want you to know him better, to like him, Garrett."

After a little he managed to say: "I'll try, if you wish."

"I do wish. Please, Garrett."

"Then I'm to understand you seriously contemplate marrying him?"

Her "Yes!" was absolute.

"Don't you see"—he hated himself for this—"he's after your money, Katherine?"

"Garrett, that is unworthy of you."

He said nothing, doggedly taking what comfort he might from the knowledge that he was right. However contemptible of him (it seemed so even to himself) he had owed this woman of his love that hardly discharged duty, of warning her. Now . . . there was the deuce to pay! He knew he had accomplished nothing through his clumsiness save to impel her toward the man; he had roused her to fight for Blackstock: that was all. Give her now the opportunity and she'd throw herself in his arms. He mumbled the word infatuation and found it sour.

Knitting his fingers together, he stared bleakly out over a landscape of naked trees casting gaunt, fantastic stencillings on footways that shone a livid dead white in the electric glare, with, by way of background, lights glinting feebly on a still, black sheet of water. Gradually he comprehended that in the course of their conversation the car had left Fifth

Avenue at the Plaza and was crossing Central Park to the Seventy-second Street entrance.

"We're near the gate," he said abruptly. "If you'll drop me there, please——"

"Certainly. Tell Patrick."

Coast groped for the speaking tube and communicated with the driver. When he sat back he was conscious of the woman's softening regard.

"You're not angry, Katherine?"

"No, Garrett; but I'm very, very sorry."

"If I've seemed presumptuous——"

"To me, Garrett? Can you remember the time when we were not—friends?"

"No. . . . I want you to understand that it wasn't altogether because I want you myself—need you, because I love you—as you know—have loved you for years. . . . It was jealousy of your happiness. I said nothing that I didn't believe."

"I know. But you were—*are* mistaken. You'll come to understand."

"I don't want you to make a mistake. Wait, Katherine, wait a little before deciding. I'm sure of your heart: it won't misguide you."

"I believe not. I know my heart and mind."

"You know mine," he said gently, and no more.

That stabbed her; she winced, wondering why. But the personality of Douglas Blackstock stood

forth so largely, limned in such vivid colouring, in the foreground of her consciousness, that there was left little room, even for old friends such as Garrett Coast.

Her imagination kindling to the thought of the man, she experienced that strange, disturbing flutter of her heart, that sense of breathlessness, which she had learned to recognise as the signal of his presence near her. Even now it was as if, because her mind dwelt upon him, he were beside her, and Garrett no more than the pale shade of a kindly memory.

She owned a little insight, was of course strongly swayed by intuition, could read men and women to some degree; but despite her youth and naïve faith in her strength of character, her ingenuous belief that already she had lived full measure, Douglas Blackstock overwhelmed her, left her thoughtless and without will. Personifying a force outside her understanding and experience, he roused in her the woman to whom her mind and heart must bend subservient. If she struggled against surrender, it was only instinctively, but half-sincerely, with something of that tremulous joy, known to women, in being overcome by strength so absolute that it scorns all strategy.

Capitulating to the sweet peril of dreaming of him who could so move her, she was sensible of a

feeling of relief when the car pulled up by a curb near the park entrance.

Afoot, Coast lingered at the door, keen eyes searching hers almost plaintively.

"I'll drop in for tea to-morrow, if you ask me, Katherine."

"Have you ever needed an invitation, Garrett?"

"Then I'll come."

Giving him her gloved hand through the window, she leaned forward. He had waited for that; now for the first time he saw her clearly as her face caught the light. His pulse quickened if his heart sank. His look was long and tender, comprehending; receiving it, she coloured faintly and dropped her eyes that they might not betray the secret of her thoughts.

She withdrew her hand.

"Good-night, Garrett."

"Good-night, Katherine."

He nodded to the driver and the car swept away.

Long after it had shot out of sight, he stood staring. Then discovering himself bareheaded, hat and stick in hand, an object of amused regard, with a curt laugh of confusion and awakened self-consciousness, he turned back through the park.

II

RESIGNING with little reluctance his place at the card-table to Dundas, whose turn it was to cut in, Coast lighted a cigarette and wandered round the dining-room of Blackstock's apartment, idly inspecting the half-dozen hunting-prints that adorned the green burlap walls. Indexing their owner's taste, they harmonised with the brass-bound mahogany wine-cellar containing whisky exclusively, the department-store Dhagestan, the heavy and laboriously simple furniture. Coast's comment (priggish, he told himself severely, in sincere effort to be just) was terse: Mission furniture will out.

Wearying, as weary of himself and his captious humour as of the wasted evening, he glanced surreptitiously at his watch. The hour was hard upon one in the morning, but as yet no one betrayed willingness to stop. In courtesy Coast could not be the first. He stifled a yawn and wedged himself into the window-seat. The air was better there, not so close nor yet so deeply stained with the fumes of smoke and alcohol which the draught from the window, open a few inches at the top, seemed powerless to modify. Languid and beginning to be conscious of a slight headache, he let his thoughts stray

into colourless vacuity, resting his vision on a vista of tumbled grey roofs and a strip of river beyond, where the Hudson glimmered like tarnished silver in the light of a waning moon.

Behind him the game dragged interminably. Below, a taxi hummed through the street, barking asthmatically. Now he heard the drone and windy roar of an L train; later, the muffled rumble of the Subway. Somewhere a piano was tinkling, mechanically defiant of municipal ordinances designed to secure for honest folk a sound night's sleep. . . .

Unspeakably bored, Coast got up and went to the buffet, where he poured a very little Scotch into a tall glass, drowning it with icy charged water. He had refused to drink up to that moment, and was thirsty, but as he sat sipping and watching the players, Van Tuyl's unnatural pallor, moist hair and fixed smile affected him with a faint disgust, and he put the glass aside, not half-emptied. His brows knitted in his concern for the man, who had been drinking heavily and would pursue that madness until satiated or sodden: no influence that Coast knew of would restrain him; he was as unmanageable as a wild horse, and as spirited.

Slender, graceful, high lord of Devil-may-Care, Van Tuyl sober was inimitable, more loved than feared in spite of, perhaps because of, the wit he wielded like a whip-lash. Excesses fanned that

brilliancy to a burning frenzy; at such times he knew no friends, and those who knew him avoided him; his wits, submerged, frothed with a satiric humour that etched as indelibly as an acid when he did not lay on with a bludgeon of vituperation. . . . A dangerous foil to Blackstock, Coast thought, comparing them, wondering that they were so much together. Contrasting them he thought: fire and tow, rapier and broadsword!

Blackstock was the broadsword of that comparison, heavy and cumbersome if capable. Coast noted how solidly he sat in his place, with what an effect of immovable determination: a largely constructed figure, above the average stature of man, at first glance almost ponderous, but with a certain alert swaying of his body from the hips upward, a tense directness of action when he snapped his cards upon the table, that suggested perfect physical condition and control. Concentration, collaboration of the mental with the physical to the desired end, inflexible will commanding success as by brute force: these were the keynotes of his character, Coast thought—epitomising his impressions in the phrase, the absolute egoist. Without effort he dominated the others, Van Tuyl always excepted; the sheer weight of Blackstock's personality forced them into the background. Little Dundas, with his deferential smile, delicately pink face and permanently rounded shoul-

ders, seemed the veriest shadow of a man: Blackstock's shadow he had apparently constituted himself. Truax, round of face and blandly practical, if unquestionably independent, was only less dwarfed by his host.

"A good bridger"—Blackstock in the current slang: giving himself wholly to the game, playing to win, "wolfing the tricks," Van Tuyl told him.

The comment brought a darkish smile to the man's face.

"What d'you want me to do with 'em?" he growled semi-humorously, flipping a card from his hand and as swiftly making his play from dummy. "Make you a present of 'em? . . . Play to that, now; come through with that ten-spot." He chuckled as he gathered in the trick and led the final card from dummy. "That'll teach you to double my original make, I guess. . . . Game and rubber, Dunny: six without doubled and a little slam. Got that down?"

"Yes," replied Dundas, grinning feebly as he jotted down the score.

"Tough luck, partner," Truax observed to Van Tuyl. "You couldn't help doubling on your hand, of course, and equally of course I *had* to be *chicane* in hearts."

"Brains, rather," observed Van Tuyl blandly, shuffling.

Blackstock interposed hastily. "That fourth-best spade of yours certainly did lead him up to slaughter." He reached over and took up the deck at Truax's elbow, spreading the cards with a dexterous sweep of his strong, blunt fingers. "New game. Cut, you fellows."

"The invitation tempts; but there are some skins too thick . . ." Van Tuyl pursued.

Truax pushed back his chair, nodding cheerfully to Coast. But for a heightened tint of colour he showed no trace of being aware of Van Tuyl's insolence. "Cut in, Garrett; it's your turn. . . . Unless," he added, "you-all want to quit. It's pretty late. I think I'll drop, for one."

"Drop," said Van Tuyl sweetly, "and be damned."

"What do you mean by that?" Truax, on his feet, turned upon his tormentor with an imperceptible tremor in his voice.

"Prudence is the better part of Bridge," Van Tuyl explained carefully. "He's a prudent man who becomes conscious of chilled extremities when ahead of the game."

Crimson with resentment, Truax hesitated, the retort on the tip of his tongue only withheld because of Coast's appealing and sympathetic look. Then with a lift of his plump shoulders he turned away, nodding to his host, Dundas and Coast.

"Good-night," he said brusquely, and so betrayed the effort his self-control cost him. "You-all can send your cheques if I am anything ahead."

"We'll try not to forget, thanks." A satiric smile on Van Tuyl's thin lips winged the Parthian dart.

Truax did not reply, but left the room abruptly, Blackstock accompanying him to the door. In his absence Coast cut in as Van Tuyl's partner and took the chair Truax had just vacated.

"Deal?" he inquired.

"Yours," Dundas told him.

"And," Van Tuyl interjected as Coast took up the cards, "let us trust you've more Bridge sense than that professional dummy." He nodded to indicate the departed Truax. "I carefully told him, early in the evening, that when I doubled I wanted not his highest heart, but the highest card of his weakest suit. Do you think *you* can remember that?"

"Yes," said Coast shortly, annoyed by the other's offensive manner.

"I sincerely trust so. I didn't come here to be rooked by everybody, by incompetent partners included."

Coast quietly put down the cards without completing the deal. "Aren't you spraining something in your attempts to be insolent, Van?" he inquired

as Blackstock reappeared. "It happens I've been your partner this evening more frequently than anybody else."

"Precisely."

"And you think yourself justified in suggesting that I've played against you?"

Van Tuyl's dark eyes met his steadily in a sardonic stare. "I'm the heaviest loser here," he said. "You've played like a raw amateur every time you've played with me. Interpret that to your liking."

"I shall." Coast got up, white to the lips. "It spells good-night to me."

Blackstock struck in with a heavy note of insincere suavity. "Oh, come now! It's early yet. Van doesn't know what he's saying——"

It was Van Tuyl's turn to rise; he accomplished the action with surprising dignity if with a slight unsteadiness. "Since when did I appoint a bounder like you to read my meaning?" he asked crisply.

Blackstock hesitated, swaying a little as his temper strained at the leash. "I'll take that from you in your present condition, Van Tuyl," he said slowly.

In his nervous anxiety to avert the quarrel, little Dundas blundered and precipitated it. "Oh, say now!" he piped. "We're all good friends. Don't let's slang one another. Come on, Van Tuyl—let's have a drink and make up."

At the suggestion Van Tuyl's weathervane humour veered. "All right," he assented: "that listens like sense." He turned to the buffet, Dundas with him.

"Good-night, Blackstock." Coast offered his hand. "I'm off now."

"Why . . . good-night." Blackstock's mouth smiled, but his speech was mechanical and his eyes, slightly prominent and magnified by thick lenses, met Coast's with an opaque look singularly suggesting a cast. "I'm sorry our party has to break up so early——"

"Look here!" Van Tuyl swung round with a glass half-full of raw Scotch in his hand. "Aren't you going to join us?"

"Thank you, no," said Coast drily.

"No," said Blackstock. "And," he added, "if I were you, Van, I'd chop that drink. It won't do you a world of good."

"Oh?" Van Tuyl smiled acidly. "Don't you know I reserve the privilege of acting as my own wet-nurse?"

"I advised you as a friend, but I'm willing to push the trespass and tell you something you evidently don't know, Van Tuyl: drink makes you ugly."

Coast, lingering in anxiety, detected suddenly the gleam of drink-insanity in Van Tuyl's eyes. Alarmed, he moved to place himself between the

men, and in the act received full in the face what had been intended for Blackstock—the contents of Van Tuyl's glass.

Half-blinded and choking, he stepped back, groping for his handkerchief. The alcohol burned his eyes like liquid fire and the fumes of it in his throat and nostrils almost strangled him for a moment, preventing his clear understanding of what was taking place. Dimly he heard Van Tuyl raving in his curiously clear and incisive accents, heard him stigmatised Blackstock card-sharp and blackguard. More vaguely he heard him name Katherine Thaxter—in what connection he did not know. On the heels of that something barked hideously; Dundas screamed like a rat; Van Tuyl said, "O God!" thickly.

Dazed with horror, Coast managed to clear his vision.

Blackstock had moved to the other side of the room, where he stood by a small table, the drawer of which he had evidently jerked open the instant before he fired. His feet were well apart and he leaned a little forward, his large head lowered upon its heavy neck. His lips were compressed to the loss of their sensual fulness, his eyes blazed beneath knotted, intent brows. One hand was clenched by his side; the other held an automatic pistol from whose muzzle a faint vapour lifted in the still hot air.

In a corner little Dundas was huddled with a face of parchment, mouth gaping, eyes astare.

Both men were watching Van Tuyl.

Coast saw the tall, graceful figure sway like a pendulum gathering momentum. An expression of strained surprise clouded the man's face. He lurched a step forward and caught himself with a hand on the card-table, and so held steady for an instant while his blank gaze, falling, comprehended the neat black puncture with its widening stain upon the bosom of his shirt.

"God . . ." he said again in a voice of pitiful inquiry.

Then he fell, dragging the table over with him.

On the sound of that, Blackstock moved for the first time. He drew himself up, relaxed, and dropped the weapon upon the table beside him. His glance encountered Coast's, wavered and turned away. He moistened his lips nervously.

Coast, with a little cry, dropped to his knees beside Van Tuyl. Already the man's eyes were glazing, the movements of the hand that tore at his breast were becoming feebly convulsive. While Coast watched he shuddered and died.

"Well?" Blackstock's voice boomed in his ears as the man's hand gripped his shoulder. Coast shook off the grasp and rose.

"You've done for him," he said, wondering at the steadiness of his own voice.

Blackstock shook his head, blinking, like a man waking from evil dreams. "Why . . . ?" he said huskily.

He turned away as if to lose sight of the figure huddled at his feet.

Dundas in his corner whimpered. Blackstock swung to him with an oath. "Shut up, damn you! D'you want——" He clicked his strong white teeth, jumping as the bell of the house-telephone interrupted. Then he went heavily to the instrument in the short hallway that led to the entrance to the apartment. Coast heard him jerk down the receiver.

"Well?" he demanded savagely.

"Yes. An accident."

"One of my guests. Yes, badly. You'd better call up Police Headquarters and tell them to send an ambulance."

"And don't let anybody up here until they come. Understand?"

He hung up the receiver with a bang and tramped back into the dining-room. "That damn' hallboy! . . . They heard the racket in the flat below and

called him up. . . . I have made a pretty mess of things!"

He went to the buffet, carefully avoiding the body, and poured himself a stiff drink, which he swallowed at a gulp.

"Here!" he said roughly. "Either of you want a bracer?"

Coast did not reply. Dundas came fearfully forth from his corner and seized a decanter, chattering its rim against a glass.

Blackstock strode restlessly back to the other end of the room and threw himself, a dead weight, into a chair, facing the wall. In the silence that followed Coast could hear his deep and regular respirations, unhurried, unchecked. After a moment, however, he swung round, dug his elbows into his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"Good God!" he said. "Why did I do that?"

Dundas coughed nervously and moved toward the door. Blackstock looked up with the face of a thundercloud.

"Where you going?"

Dundas stammered an incoherent excuse.

"Well, you stop where you are. Get back to that window-seat—and try to keep your miserable teeth still, can't you? D'you think I'm going to let you desert me now, after all I've done for you, you ungrateful rat?"

Without a protest Dundas sidled fearfully between him and what had been Van Tuyl, and returned to the window-seat. Blackstock's glowering gaze fell upon Coast. A sour grimace twisted his mouth.

"You're not a bad fellow, Coast," he said—"to stick by me. . . ."

Exerting himself, Coast tried to master his aversion and contempt for the man as well as his blind horror of the crime.

"What are you going to do?"

"Do?" Blackstock jumped up and began to pace to and fro. "What the hell can I do but give myself up?"

"You mean that?"

The question was involuntary on Coast's part, wrung from him by surprise, so difficult he found it to credit the man's sincerity.

"Of course," Blackstock explained simply: "it's too late now to make a get-away. . . . If it hadn't been for that racket . . . They'd cop me before I could get out of town." He paused, questioning Coast with his intent stare. "You wouldn't let me off, would you? You'd tell the police, of course?"

"Of course."

Blackstock nodded as if he found the reply anything but surprising. "Of course. He was your friend."

"Yours, too. Why did you do it?"

"This damnable temper of mine. He—didn't you hear?—threatened to tell Kate Thaxter. . . ."
Blackstock resumed his walk.

"What?"

"Never mind—something to prevent our marriage."

"And you killed him for that!"

Blackstock stopped, staring down at the body.
"Yes," he said in a subdued voice.

"If that's your way, you'd have had to murder me also, you know, before you could have married Miss Thaxter."

The man looked up and nodded. "Well, it's too late now. That's done for good and all. We needn't quarrel about it."

He went back to his seat.

"Good Lord, how long they are!"

He began to talk, to maunder to himself of what might have been and what had been, speaking of his aims, ambitions, achievements in an oddly detached way, as he might have reviewed another's life, only emotional when forced to realisation of the fact that this was the end of it all. The phrase, "This ends it!" punctuated the semi-confessional soliloquy monotonously, repeated over and over with the same falling inflection. Coast detected not a word, not even a note of regret for his crime, save

in as far as it affected Blackstock's fortunes—
blasted them.

He watched the man intently, in spite of the repugnance he inspired, fascinated by this too frank disclosure of callous and heartless egoism no less than by what had happened. At the thought of this from which Katherine Thaxter had been saved, he was shaken by a physical disgust almost amounting to nausea. . . .

After a time he ceased to listen consciously, his senses straining for the first sound to indicate the arrival of the police and his release from this chamber of horror.

He thought dully, with strangely little feeling, of the publicity he must endure as chief witness to a murder done in a drunken brawl. The yellows wouldn't spare him, he knew. There'd be columns of stuff about him, dragging him through the filth, besmirching his name—with photographs, drawings showing him as he appeared then, with his shirt and collar wilted and stained by the liquor Van Tuyl had thrown. Something difficult to live down: there'd be no escaping that ignominy. . . .

A shrill clamour of the telephone bell electrified them all. Dundas cried out. Blackstock jumped up and stumbled into the hall. Coast, rising, heard his voice.

"Yes. Tell them to come up."

He returned, almost reeling. "Here, Dundas," he said slowly, "you let 'em in, will you, like a good fellow."

Mute in his panic, Dundas went to the door.

Coast could hear the whine of the ascending elevator, the clanking of its safety chains. . . .

Abruptly he was conscious that Blackstock's temper had undergone a change. From passive surrender to his fate the man had passed to a mood of active resistance. Somehow instinctively Coast seemed to divine this in the surcharged, tense atmosphere of that moment. He shot a swift, suspicious look at the man, and caught in return a look of low cunning and desperation.

He saw Blackstock in a pose of attention, listening, every sense alert, every muscle flexed—a man gathering himself together as a cat about to spring.

The elevator was very near the floor.

"By God!" Blackstock whispered, wetting his lips; and again his eyes were blazing. "I'll fool 'em yet!"

The man turned swiftly. Outside, the elevator-gate clanged. Coast heard a confusion of footfalls and voices, a knocking on the door. And suddenly he understood what Blackstock intended. Already he had regained the side table and snatched up the pistol. He turned with it lifted. "They shant have me!" he cried, and reversed it to his temple.

"You fool!" Coast screamed unconsciously. With almost incredible swiftness of action he flung himself upon Blackstock and seized the pistol, deflecting it toward the ceiling. It exploded.

For a moment longer he was struggling frantically with Blackstock to save the man from self-destruction. Then, without warning, he was seized and dragged away, holding the pistol. A strange hand snatched that away. Other hands pinioned his arms to his sides. He fought for freedom for an instant, then ceased to resist, thunderstruck with amazement.

Blackstock towered over him, pointing him out. "That's your man—take him!" he cried. "He's done murder and was trying suicide—I managed to keep him quiet until he heard you coming, then he made a grab for the pistol. Thank God, you're in time!"

Something stuck in Coast's throat—his tongue trying to articulate in a mouth dry with fear and consternation. "You liar!" he managed to say. "You——"

"Shut up, you!" One of the policemen holding him clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Why," he heard Blackstock say, "you saw him yourself, gentlemen. If there's any question in your minds, here's Mr. Dundas, who saw it all. Dundas, who shot Van Tuyl? Mr. Coast, here?"

Dimly as if through a haze Coast saw Dundas

emerge from the press of men in the room, a ghost of a man, eyelids quivering, limbs shaking, features working in his small, pasty face. And in his anguish of anger, fear and resentment, Coast detected the look, unobserved by any other, of secret understanding that passed between the two men.

"Yes," Dundas said, his voice tremulous. "Why—why of course Mr. Coast did it."

Coast felt the chill of handcuffs on his wrist—a chill that ate into his soul.

III

WARBURTON had forgotten nothing. Coast walked out of Sing Sing to enter his own car, his departure so contrived and timed that he was conscious neither of a strange face nor a curious stare. The occupant of the driver's seat proved to be the mechanic who had driven for him prior to his trial and conviction; his "Good-morning, Mr. Coast; it's a pleasure to see you looking so well, sir," conveyed precisely the right degree of respectful congratulation: in this, too, Coast recognised the hand of his lawyer. He was grateful, further, for the hamper containing an excellent cold lunch, as well as for the fact, which Warburton presently disclosed, that the affair of his release had been managed so swiftly and quietly that only the latest editions of that day's evening papers would contain the news.

"We tried to give you as much time as we could," Warburton told him. "Whatever your plans are, you'll be glad not to be mobbed before you get a chance to put 'em across."

Coast's swift smile was reward enough for the little man. He snuggled comfortably into his corner of the tonneau, the broad eccentric curves of his

plump face and figure radiating pride of conquest in addition to the honest delight he felt because of his client's deliverance. Occasionally he wriggled restlessly; speech seemed at times about to bubble from his lips, effervescent with pleasure. Himself inhabited by a demon of volubility, he found it hard to contain the details of this triumph until such time as Coast should choose to demand them. To him Coast's silence, his shrinking reticence, his shy avoidance of the subject that must be uppermost in his mind, was altogether out of nature. Yet his sense of delicacy counselled him to refrain from leading up to it.

"Give him time," he told himself. "He wants to think, to get his bearings—poor devil! Why, it's been so sudden, so unexpected that you yourself have hardly gotten over your surprise. Think how it must be with him. . . . No; I wont talk till he gives the word."

But if he held his tongue, it was hardly; the shimmer of gratulation remained in evidence, refusing to be ignored.

To his client and friend the world rocked in a sea of emotions rediscovered. The sense of freedom, of space, of motion, the soft buffeting in his face of the clean, sweet, unpent air, the recognition of a new-born world a-riot with colour—vernal green, ineffable empyrean blue, flooding gold of sunlight—

played upon his heart a muted melody. He was, in truth, a little dazed with the sweetness of it all, regained; as if not until that hour had he known since childhood how sound and sweet, how wonderful and beautiful could be the world he lived in. The panorama of the old Post Road unrolled before him in exquisite loveliness, as of a dream come true.

Conflicting with these impressions, bewildering in their number and variety, thoughts presently assailed him.

Again he thanked his God his father and mother had not lived to know the day of his arrest. . . .

He experienced a curious freak of memory, very suddenly seeing between him and the glorious world a fragment of a scene at his trial, exceedingly vivid: Blackstock groping a slow way toward the witness-stand, his dark face the darker for an eye-shade, his eyes masked sinisterly with smoked glasses. . . .

Poor old Van Tuyl! . . .

His nerves crawled with apprehensions inspired by the city toward which the car was bearing him: the city of his birth and banishment; the city inexorable, insatiable, argus-eyed, peopled with its staring millions, ravening with curiosity, whose appetite should long since have been glutted with details of his disgrace. He found appalling the thought of re-entering it, of trying again to take up his former life in its easy, ordered groove, of coming

and going in the company of those in whose eyes his brow would be forever branded with the mark of Cain—yes, even though he were exonerated of the crime of which he had been accused, for which he had been placed on trial, convicted, and sentenced. Would they ever learn to believe him guiltless, even though the truth were published broadcast, trumpeted from the house-tops? Would he not remain to them always the questionable hero of a sensational murder trial, whose escape from the electric chair had been due simply and solely to the exertions of his influential friends? . . .

Exoneration!

The word was sweeter to him than the name of Freedom had been to his forebears in 1776 and 1861. He dared not breathe it—yet; he dared not hope for it nor even question whether or not it had been made his. It was his thought that he had rather return to deathly immolation in those stark grey walls, now momentarily dropping far and farther behind him, than regain freedom without exculpation complete and indubitable.

What if his release had been solely due to the offices of his friends, to pressure brought to bear upon the State executive . . . ? He felt that to discover such to be the case would prove insufferable. Death itself were preferable to life without vindication of the charge that had been laid against him. . . .

So terribly he feared to learn the truth. . . .

His friends, those who had stood by him, those who had been silent, those who had denied him: what would be their reception of him now? He conned the names of a dozen of the dearest: did they believe in him, even now, in their secret hearts? Had they ever had absolute faith in his innocence, despite their protestations? Would he himself ever cease to doubt them secretly? . . .

Katherine Thaxter . . . ?

He had heard nothing of or from her since his conviction; before that, little enough: a note or two of halting sympathy, tintured by a constraint he had been afraid to analyse. Whether it had been due to belief in his guilt, or to a thing more dreadful in his understanding, he had never found the courage to debate, not even in the longest watches of the hopeless nights when he had lain in waking torment in his cell, listening to some miserable condemned wretch moaning in his sleep a door or two down the Row. . . .

His thoughts had swung full circle. He ceased to think coherently.

Inscrutable to Warburton: he seemed a man without nerves or feeling who sat beside him, motionless, expressionless, his eyes fixed as though his inner vision searched some far and dim horizon. What

were his thoughts? Curiosity gnawed the mind of the plump and well-fed little lawyer; he began to suspect that he had never really known his client, close as had been their association in the years before his trial. He had discounted transports, had forecast a rain of eager inquiries: but Coast remained mute, hedged about with impenetrable reserve. . . . Little changed in outward seeming, the lawyer thought: sobered—yes; high youthful spirits exorcised; something thinner, perhaps; a trifle pale, too—the prison pallor, that. These points aside—much as he had always appeared superficially: turned out to confront the world as he had always faced it, impeccable in attire—the least thought dandified: native distinction persisting, as something ineradicable: a man hard to ignore, whatever the circumstances in which he showed himself. His lips retained their quaintly whimsical droop that had ever seemed one of his most engaging charms, his brows their habit of the crooked twist whether he were thoughtful or animated. . . . Much the same, vastly different, Warburton concluded. He sighed.

In time he touched Coast's arm with a gentle hand. "Lunch?" he queried, almost plaintive.

To see Coast smile once more was a keen delight. . . .

When they had finished, Coast, refreshed and strengthened, diverted and enlivened, boldly grasped the nettle.

"Well——?" he asked with a steady glance of courage.

Warburton pounced nimbly upon his chance. "It's exoneration," he began, and unconsciously hit the apt word so squarely that he caught himself up with a gasp at Coast's reception of it. "Why?" he cried, alarmed, "you're white as a sheet, man! I said exoneration—full and clear!"

Coast reassured him with a gesture. "It's just joy," he explained simply. He put his head back against the cushions, closed his eyes and drew a long breath. "How was I to guess how all this had been brought about? I was afraid to ask, afraid to surmise, even. Tell me, please."

"It came—like thunder out of a clear sky, Garrett: none more amazed than I." Warburton reverted to the habit of clipped phrases that characterised his moments of excitement. "I suppose you know—you've seen the papers?"

"Only infrequently. I . . . was a bit cowardly about them, I presume."

"Then you hadn't heard about Blackstock?" Coast shook his head. "Well, his eyes went back on him—were failing during the trial, if you'll remember. I heard he'd injured them somehow—

with his wireless experiments, you know. He went nearly blind and took himself out of the country—to Germany, the papers said, to consult a Berlin specialist, perhaps to undergo an operation.”

“One moment.” Coast took a deep breath. “Did he go alone?”

“So far as I know. Why?”

“No matter. Call it idle curiosity.”

“Well, so much for Blackstock—until the police get wind of him, at all events. They’re trying to locate him by cable now; haven’t heard of any success that way, however. Naturally . . . But a few days ago, Dundas came to the surface.”

Coast started violently. “Dundas!”

“Um-mm: full confession, exculpating you, incriminating Blackstock. Corroborative details: letters from Blackstock—all that sort of thing. Furthermore, Dundas told us why Blackstock feared Van Tuyl: Van knew something—some dirty business Blackstock had cooked up in the West. Immaterial now: tell you later. Also Dundas took us to the shop where Blackstock bought that gun—salesman recalled the transaction. You remember how we failed to prove the gun his?”

“Of course. Go on about Dundas.”

“Well . . . it was Truax’s doing: nailed Dundas on the street one day, somewhere east of Third Avenue. The man had been in hiding ever since Black-

stock cleared out; he was in a pretty bad way, broke and seedy; claimed Blackstock hadn't sent him a dollar since he disappeared. So Dundas, thrown back upon his pen for means of livelihood, went all to pieces: couldn't work—had forgotten the trick—or wouldn't; drank up all he could raise by pawning things. . . . Truax staked him to a meal and drinks, plenty of drinks; and all that on an empty stomach made him maudlin. Confessed he was keeping a conscience—remorse gnawing at his vitals—whatever those are—everything like that. Then Truax bundled him into a taxi and brought him to my rooms. It was near midnight—got me out of bed: I caught a cold. However . . . I own it without compunction, we worked the poor devil through the third degree: simply browbeat and bullyragged him until I was ashamed of myself. But the truth oozed out finally, along with tears—whisky tears. We hadn't stinted the bottle. . . .

“As I say, in the end Dundas owned up to the whole filthy affair, just as you told it—whimpered about selling his soul to Blackstock, price not deposited. We made him sign a brief confession, but I knew that wouldn't be sufficient, and it was then too late and Dundas too far gone to do more with him. So I called in a Central Office man I happened to know and turned Dundas over to him to be taken to

a Turkish bath and licked into shape; and it did the trick, with a hearty breakfast and plenty of black coffee for a chaser. He was pretty shaky next morning, but I coaxed him into a taxi and had him at the District Attorney's office before he knew what was up. There he wanted to hedge, but his signature to the overnight confession took all the starch out of him, and he went all over it again, with a stenographer taking it down—typewritten deposition—all that sort of thing. . . .

“Meanwhile my friend the detective had ransacked Dundas' lodging—some cheap room just off the Bowery—and found a bundle of letters from Blackstock—mostly written during the trial, when they didn't dare be seen together—hints and orders as to the evidence Dundas was to give. That settled it. Dundas was rushed before a magistrate and jailed and the Grand Jury was asked to indict him for perjury. The poor fool was scared silly, as soon as he realised what he had done—declared Blackstock would get him sooner or later. So he saved him the trouble—killed himself in his cell half an hour after being committed—had a phial of morphia secreted in his clothing . . .”

After a pause Coast said slowly: “So Blackstock did ‘get’ him after all! That makes two at least—two we know of.”

"Yes," Warburton assented uneasily, worried by the hard expression that lined Coast's mouth; "looked at that way, yes. . . . Well, we called your trial judge into consultation—the District Attorney and I—and between the three of us drew up a petition for your pardon, the District Attorney being the first to sign. I got off to Albany by the first train. There wasn't the slightest trouble: the Governor granted the pardon without a murmur. . . . And here we are."

"And here we are," Coast repeated in a whisper. He was quiet for a time. . . . "You know I can't thank you, old man," he said at length, rousing.

Warburton's fat little hand rested a moment lightly upon his shoulder. "You don't have to. I feel too good about it myself. Always knew it would come out right. Never lost faith in you, not for a second, Garrett."

He rattled on, Coast listening by fits and snatches. He heard a little of this matter and that, heard less of more. He replied at times, abstractedly. . . .

Katherine Thaxter? Had she heard? All Coast's thoughts focussed upon this: he must see her. . . .

There came a pause, made awkward by a constraint in Warburton's manner. Coast glanced at him inquiringly. The little lawyer licked his lips nervously.

"There's one thing," he said, "you won't like perhaps."

Coast smiled. "I'm not in a mood for fault-finding. What is it?"

"Of course you know it's desirable to get Blackstock."

"Well?"

"You won't be fully cleared, in the public mind at least, until he's convicted in your stead."

"That's true enough."

"So we're keeping it quiet, for the time being—the reasons for your release, I mean."

"Why? What's the sense of that?" Coast demanded excitedly. "You said 'exoneration'! . . ."

"So it is, so it will be. But we don't want to scare Blackstock. If he hears that Dundas has confessed, he'll never be found. If we permit him to think, as the public will certainly think, that you are pardoned principally because of your social standing and 'pull' . . . then he won't be so wary. You see? So we're withholding the real reason. Be patient: it will only be for a little while. And in the end it will be exoneration, absolute and unquestionable. Will you stand for this?"

Coast nodded sombrely at the dull haze hanging over the sweltering city toward which they raced. "I presume I must," he said wearily; "but it's hard—thundering hard. . . . I had hoped . . ."

"I know, old boy." Warburton's hand touched his again. "But it's for the best—for your best interests, believe me."

Coast's chin sank despondently upon his breast. "I must go away for a time," he said, or, rather, muttered, his accents so soft that Warburton failed to distinguish them—"clear out for a time . . ."

The drone of a hive saluted them. The city stretched forth its numbered tentacles to receive them.

They came to street lamps, trolley tracks, streets hewn out of raw, red earth and grey rock, the smell of Man in the aggregate; to a lofty arch of masonry that spanned with a graceful sweep a placid, turgid stream dotted with river craft; to blocks of tenements, pavements checkered with the shadow of the elevated, barrel organs and jiggling children, traffic pressing to a common centre; to the crash and clamour, rush and roar, the blending dissonances of New York.

They passed a corner news-stand where a man stood with a paper outspread before him, the width of its front sheet occupied by headlines in huge black type, heralding the sensation of the hour.

They who rode might read:

GARRETT COAST PARDONED!
AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR!!!

Coast shivered as if chilled and sank back, crouching, faint with dismay, in his corner of the tonneau. Publicity had him in its relentless clutches. He had this to endure: the continued exploitation of his name and personality, the rehashing of the hideous story, importunities of strangers, sickening sentimentality of silly women . . .

At two in the afternoon the car stopped before the building on Nassau Street in which Warburton had offices. Coast alighted, sick with fear of recognition. The sidewalk throng passed him with blank looks, but the elevator boy had a copy of the blatant sheet and a stare for Mr. Warburton's client. In Warburton's private room there was business to distract him: papers to be signed, details to be arranged, letters and telegrams of congratulation, already coming in by the score, to be opened and read. He was called on the telephone—Warburton carefully satisfying himself as to the caller's identity before turning the receiver over to Coast. His hope was nipped with disappointment: it was merely Truax calling to offer his felicitations and demand Coast's presence at "a little dinner at the Club—just a few of us, all friends of yours"; the hour, seven that night. Mechanically Coast promised and rang off. He was unable to refuse: in his heart he knew that he would be unable to go.

"What about my rooms?" he asked suddenly.

Warburton beamed. "They're waiting for you, everything just as you left it. I kept track of both your old servants; they're there, too. Just walk in and hang up your hat."

Coast meditated. "That's like you, Dick," he said.

An office boy entered. "Reporter from the *Joinal* wants to see Mister Coast."

"I've left," said Coast.

He thought soberly, frowning for a moment. "That puts my place out of the question; they'll swarm there."

"Yes," agreed Warburton.

"I'll put up at some hotel to-night."

"Made up your mind which?"

"No; I'll call you up when I'm settled. . . . You'd better give me some money."

Warburton's pudgy features contorted themselves to express chagrin. "The one thing I forgot!"

"Then send somebody out for it."

"How much?" Warburton drew a cheque-book toward him. "A hundred?"

A long pause prefaced Coast's estimate. "Five thousand."

The lawyer whistled. "The devil you say! What d'you want with all that?"

"How can I tell?"

With a sigh and a shrug Warburton drew the cheque and rang for his head clerk. That person brought with him the information that representatives of the *Times*, the *Sun* and the *Herald* had foregathered with the *Journal* reporter in the outer office, and would not be denied.

"Get the money," said Warburton. "I'll 'tend to the rest."

He made a sortie into the reception-room and returned crestfallen. "I've lied like a trooper," he confessed, "but they wont budge. You were seen to enter: you haven't been seen to leave."

"Then," said Coast, "I'll stop here to-night."

Warburton shook his head in cheerful dissent. "Not in the least necessary. I'll fix you up all right. You can slip out into the hall by this door—I'll make sure the coast's clear, first—dodge round into the Liberty Street corridor, and take the elevator there. You're hardly liable to be recognised on either the Subway or the L, if you're careful. Make your own selection of a hotel and call me up at the Club any time after five. Meanwhile I'll send a boy to your rooms for whatever you want, and he'll bring everything to you at any hour you name."

Coast smiled agreement. "That's a wonderful head your wear, Dick, but I doubt if your scheme will work; it's too simple . . ."

Its very simplicity made it practicable, however;

and a little after four Coast made his escape precisely as Warburton had planned.

His journey uptown in the Subway, which he accomplished without misadventure, shielding himself behind a newspaper, was his first taste of unrestricted freedom—and by that token a delight without alloy. Indeed, it went slightly to his head, intoxicating him with a sense of adventure. He was conscious of a gradual access of elation, a growing buoyancy of spirit.

At a quiet and inconspicuous hotel in the Forties, some distance from Broadway, he registered boldly as "Brainerd West, Philadelphia," and paid for his room in advance, explaining that his luggage would come in later. The open stare of the room-clerk irritated him but little, whose thoughts were preoccupied with a hundred half-formed and less than half-considered plans.

In his rooms, forgetful of his promise to telephone Warburton, he threw himself upon the bed to ponder the next move; and exhaustion, superinduced by excitement, overcame him almost immediately. For the better part of an hour he slept without stirring, and wakened in the end only to the shrilling, prolonged and not to be denied, of the telephone by the head of his bed.

Still a little stupid with sleep, he required a moment or two to grasp the import of the switch-

board operator's advice, to the effect that a Mr. Cross, representing the *Evening World*, would like to see Mr. Brainerd West. The message was repeated in accents peremptory before he comprehended that he had again been run to earth.

"Ask the gentleman to come up at once," he said, and, seizing his hat, left the room as soon as he had finished speaking.

Ascending a single flight of the stairway that wound round the elevator shaft, he waited until the car began to rise, then rang. As he had foreseen, it paused at the floor below to discharge the newspaper man before coming up for him. As he stepped into the cage he pressed half a dollar into the operator's palm.

"Down," he demanded: "ground floor. And don't stop for anybody."

A single minute later he was in the street. Haste being the prime essential of the situation, he dodged round the corner into Sixth Avenue, walked a block uptown, and turned through to Broadway.

There suddenly, as he paused at the upper end of Longacre Square, doubting which way to turn, what to do, he quickened to sensibility of his solitude, and knew himself more utterly alone in that hour than ever he had been throughout his days.

Round him the life of the city eddied and swirled in its endless dance of death; in his ears its voice

raved and clamoured, cacophonous and deafening; the very earth beneath his feet seemed a-throb with the mighty pulsations of its arteries; its myriad eyes he felt focussed upon his heart, analysing and dissecting its secret history with the imperturbable, persistent calm of a vivisector striving to read the riddle of life in the death agony of a dog on the bench.

Foot-loose and free, yet forlorn and friendless, a wanderer in ways the stranger since he had once known them so very well! Friendship could not avail to help him, who stood pitted, willy-nilly, against the multitude. He had himself alone to look to; and he felt himself overweak, still raw and suffering from the lash, too worn and weary for the fight, unaided.

A passing hansom pulled in to his signal. He entered, giving the address of Katherine Thaxter's home.

There was a crimson glare of sunset down the street when he alighted and paid his fare. Westward, over the parapet-wall of Riverside Drive, the Palisades loomed, cool purple against the burning skies. Clouds like a spray of golden petals swam in the turquoise vault.

"Just in time," said Coast; "I was to come to tea to-day—I begged the privilege only yesterday. . . ."

He paused, silenced by a presentiment bred of

the aspect of the house. At every window the shades were drawn level with the sills. The flight of brownstone steps, littered with wind-swept dust and débris, ran up to heavy oaken doors, tight-closed. The seal of a burglar-protective concern stared at him from a corner of one of the drawing-room windows. Only in the old-fashioned basement were there signs of life: the area-gateway stood open; a gas-jet glimmered through sash-curtains.

Heavily Coast turned into the area, and rang the basement bell.

After some time the door was opened to him and he entered, to have his hand caught and fawned upon by the aged butler who had smuggled him sweets when Coast in the pride and pomp of his first knickerbockers had come to play with Katherine in her nursery.

"Oh, Mr. Garrett, Mr. Garrett!" the old voice quavered. "God bless the day, sir! I've seen the papers and I said that you'd be here, sir, as soon as ever you got back home. I knew 'twould turn out so sir, from the first; I've never failed to stand up for you and say you never done it. . . . But a black shame it is justice was so long in coming——"

Soames rambled on, garrulous in semi-senile joy. Coast leaned wearily against the wall of the gloomy basement hallway, with no heart to interrupt. At length, however, he found his voice.

"Thank you, Soames," he said gently. "But—Miss Katherine?"

The answer he had foreseen, hopelessly. "Gone, sir—gone this many a day. . . . You know what happened, sir?"

"I can guess. But tell me." He steeled himself against the disclosure of what he already knew with intuitive certainty.

"Mrs. Gresham died—you knew that, sir?" Soames named Katherine's aunt, with whom she had lived after her parents' death.

"During my trial—yes, I knew."

"She never believed you guilty, sir. Perhaps you'd like to know . . ."

"But Miss Katherine?"

The old man shook his head mournfully. "Mad, sir, mad . . ." he mumbled.

Coast caught his wrist fiercely. "What's that you say?"

"I say she was mad, sir, to do what she done, and that I'll say though it cost me my place. . . . It wasn't a decent three months after Mrs. Gresham passed away, sir—you'd been—been sent away barely a month—when she married him——"

"Blackstock?"

"Yes, sir. . . . She didn't know what she was doing, sir. I've thought it was what I've heard



“She didn’t know her own mind when he was
talking to her.”

'called infatuation. She didn't know her own mind when he was talking to her. He carried her clean off her feet, so to speak. . . . So they was married and went away."

"Where?"

"To Germany, I understood, sir."

"You've heard——?"

"Never a word—not a line. I sometimes wonder at it, sir. She left me a bit of money to run things on till she returned, but that's gone long ago, sir, and I've had to draw upon my savings. . . . She must know. . . ."

Blindly Coast turned and reeled into the servants' dining-room, where he fell into a chair by the table, pillowing his head upon his arms.

A passion of blind, dumb rage shook him by the throat; blackness of despair succeeded that; he sat motionless, witless, overwhelmed.

An hour or two passed before the butler aroused him with an offer of biscuits and a decanter of rare old port: all the house had, he protested, fit to offer his Mr. Garrett.

Coast ate and drank mechanically, without sense of taste or refreshment. Even the generous wine lay cold within him.

Still later he asked for writing materials and scrawled a few lines to Warburton, briefly request-

ing him to look after Soames and advance him money from time to time, according to his needs, pending the return of his mistress.

Then, rising, he stumbled forth into the night, at once unconscious and heedless of whither his feet were leading him, walking far and blindly under the sway of a physical instinct dumbly demanding of him action and exertion.

Threading mile after mile of city streets, he moved as a man dreaming, retaining in his subsequently awakened faculties only fragmentary memories of his wanderings.

At one time he paused momentarily upon a bridge that spanned a straightened flood of inky water, which he dully knew to be the Harlem River. Again he found his way barred by the gates of a railway grade-crossing. When a train had rocketed past and the gates were raised, he plunged on doggedly into the fastnesses of The Bronx, seeking unceasingly he knew not what.

Midnight found him on a hilltop far beyond the city limits, insensibly comforted by the great calm of the tranquil countryside, blanketed with kindly darkness, lighted only by the arching stars. There was a wind of freedom in his face, sweet with the keen tang of the sea. Before him there was only the mystery of chance, the grateful oblivion of the

open spaces; behind him a lurid, glaring sky, overhanging the city of his renunciation.

Without a thought of choice, he trudged onward into the unknown.

So, plodding, the night enfolded him to her great bosom, warm with peace. . . .

IV

To the boat-yard and ship-chandlery establishment of a certain Mr. Huxtable in the town of Fairhaven, on the eastern bank of the Acushnet River, there came—or, rather, drifted with the tide of a casual fancy—toward the close of a day in June, Garrett Coast.

A declining sun threw his shadow athwart the floor of the chandlery. Huxtable glanced up from the muddle of papers on his desk. Coast lounged easily in the doorway, with one shoulder against the frame: a man notably tall and slender and graced, besides, with a simple dignity of manner that assorted oddly, in the Huxtable understanding, with clothing well-worn and travel-stained. Out of a face moderately browned, his dark eyes glimmered with a humour whimsical, regarding Huxtable.

The object of their regard pushed up his spectacles for a better view. "Well?" he inquired, not without a suspicion of grim resentment, who was not weathered to laughter at his own expense.

It happened, however, that Coast's amusement

sprang from another cause: his own utter irresponsibility, which alone had led him to the chandlery, he considered hugely diverting.

"I was just thinking," he said, smiling, "that now would be a useful time to buy a boat."

Huxtable, possessed of an inherent predilection for taciturnity, liable, ever and anon, to be sore beset if not wholly put to rout by the demon Curiosity (a familiar likewise legitimately handed down to him by several generations of New England forebears), in this instance contented himself with a mute nod to signify that he had heard and now awaited without prejudice a more explicit declaration.

"A boat," Coast added, "preferably of the centre-board cat type, with a hard-working motor auxiliary."

The Huxtable mind, which you are to believe typical of its caste, like a ship wisely navigated, moved cautiously in well-buoyed channels. It clung to tradition, whether in the business of boat-building, which it pursued to admiration, or in the lighter diversion of humour, to which its attitude resembled that of the ancestor-worshipping heathen Chinese. Premonitory symptoms of a reversion to type in the matter of wit were betrayed by the corrugation of the Huxtable wrinkles.

"To go sailin' in?"

After this utterance, tradition flapped its wings

and screamed; Huxtable himself condescended to chuckle; Coast, to a tolerant smile.

"Possibly," he conceded. "Have you such a boat?"

"I might have," Huxtable admitted cautiously. "Come along." He rose and led the way through a back-door into the boat-yard.

With a twist of his eyebrows spelling doubt, Coast followed. He was not wholly satisfied that there was any wisdom latent in this latest freak of his errant fancies. For a fortnight he had given impulse its head, and so, docile to its aimless divagations, had found contentment of a sort—more a parody than the real thing: dreamless rest won through wholesome bodily fatigue, a waking distraction bred of constant change of scene: thin ice over the troubled deeps of a heart embittered. Eastward from New York he had wandered, mostly afoot, unknown, unrecognised, Warburton alone cognisant of his movements, and that under strict injunction of silence; thus he had come blindly, seeking surcease of his distemper, finding only the oblivion of fatigue. And recently he had become uneasily conscious that even that was losing its effect, as an opiate will in a frame too long habituated to its action: now and again the thought of Katherine and Blackstock would crawl in his mind, viperous, poisoning the very sunlight.

Here, without presage, he found his whim aiming for salt water. Was he wise to humour it? Would he find healing in the swing of the seas, the savour of spray, the hiss of waters broken by plunging bows, the gurgle astern?

The blood in him stirred to this seduction.

He submitted, or rather did not resist, with a ductility strange in him, swayed by the feeling he had at times that a clear-visioned destiny led him by the hand. In those days he was near to fatalism.

Huxtable led him directly to a little vessel in a cradle on the ways and bright with new paint. "The *Echo*," he introduced her: "five year old, weather-wise, sound and sweet, fast and able. Ye'll find she'll stand up under any wind brewed hereabouts, this time o' year—and nose right into it, too. Built her myself. Twenty-six foot over all, Cape Cod model, plenty of headroom, sleeps two. Ten hoss-power jump-spark motor—'ll kick her along 'bout eight mile an hour. Full equipment: cushions, lamps, bell, whistle, binnacle, automatic bilge-pump 'at she don't need—don't leak a mite. Owner left her with me for sale. Seven hundred and a bargain."

Coast strolled round the boat with an eye critical of her lines, then clambered up the skeleton ribs of the cradle and dropping into her cockpit, verifying Huxtable's catalogue of attractions. Presently he

climbed down again, impressed that the boat would probably justify its recommendation to the letter.

"When can you put her in the water?"

"In fifteen minutes."

"Do so, then, please, and have the gasoline tanks filled and the batteries wired up. . . . I'll want these besides." He found a pencil and scrap of paper and scribbled a list of supplies. . . . "You've a spare mooring off here?" he inquired, and received an affirmative. "Then put her off; I'll sleep aboard her to-night. Now I'll take a turn up town and buy provisions and things."

"And the price?" suggested Huxtable drily.

Coast produced a bill-fold fat with the money Warburton had drawn for him—very little depleted. Huxtable stared: the demon Curiosity frothed at sight of so much wealth in the hands of a man so shabby; its tenement breathed heavily, fingering with incredulity several bills, unmistakably genuine.

"I'll take a bill of sale, please," said Coast. "You can have it ready by the time I come back."

The demon broke its shackles. "Sa-ay, who be ye, anyway?"

Coast, making off, paused. "A sick man," he said slowly, "seeking a cure." And he pursued his way, harried by the doubt: was this the prescription?

The business of buying for his new enterprise

proved sufficiently diverting to relegate the question to the background of his consciousness. Nor did it again trouble him until half the night had waned.

He fitted out without thought of economy: in the list of his acquisitions he could find no lack; by night-fall the *Echo* was furnished with everything that Coast could think of as essential or desirable for a coast-wise cruise, whether brief or protracted.

He dined ashore, returned to the boat and spent an hour or so poring over charts of the neighbouring waters; and finally, extinguishing the kerosene lantern swinging from a deck-beam, composed himself upon one of the cushioned transoms.

There was no plausible excuse for his failing to sleep; the *Echo* rode without much perceptible motion, moored about a hundred yards off-shore; waters whispered somnolently alongside; the town was quiet. Yet slumber was denied him; an unwonted excitement sparked his imagination, kindled by a sense of adventure distilled from to-morrow's promise; he thought rapidly and persistently, staring wide-eyed at the pallid patch of sky visible through the open companionway, or watching the monotonously gentle sway and shift of a livid square of moonlight on the cabin wall.

The day had died in calm; a soft stillness held the night in thrall. Distant noises vibrated across

the waters, thinly distinct: the roaring of a train, the grinding of a trolley car crossing an adjacent bridge, up-stream; infrequently voices of men near the riverside; only less frequently a muted chiming of ships' bells, chanting antiphonal the morning hours.

At five bells he rose and went on deck to smoke, his trouble heavy upon him. The cockpit was not more drenched with moonlight than with dew, but the air was motionless and suave; in pyjamas and slippers, lolling upon the dry side of an overturned seat cushion, he felt no need of heavier clothing. His pipe fumed its pungent solace. Consolation he found likewise in the sheer wonder of the night's beauty. The harbour stretched about him, an imperceptibly undulant sheet of burnished metal, shadowed on its farther shore by wharves and warehouses, blotted here and there by the bulks and shadows of anchored vessels whose spars and riggings etched webs of inky strands against the tinted skies. Water-front lights winked brightly, flinging out their vivid streamers between serpentine shadows like forked tongues of darkness, quivering. There was sibilance of wavelets in the quiet, and in the air a faint reek of tar, salt water, oil, a hundred smells of shipping, blending to fragrance.

Presently a breath of air stirred feebly; catspaws darkened the silver; sighing, the air died; the flawed

surface of the harbour smoothed and brightened. Then again the breeze fanned up out of the north-west, vacillant: advancing, languishing, waxing gradually in volume until it blew full and free. Un-numbered shadows checkered the moonlit waters as they quickened to a farandole, gaily stepping to music of their own making.

Coast shrugged to the chill and rose to go below, but paused, attracted by a stir of life aboard a small, two-masted schooner that had been riding idly at anchor between two and three hundred feet away toward ship-channel.

He saw a movement of bustling men upon her deck. Her sailing lights appeared: a green star-board eye glared at him fixedly. The mainsail was hoisted, the foresail went up. He watched a revolving knot of figures forward, and heard the clanking of the capstan together with the grating of her anchor chains. Slowly, link by link, the schooner forged up against the tide, until the anchor, a-trip, broke ground and was weighed in, some little distance above the *Echo's* mooring. Then, falling off broadside to the ebbing current, the vessel shaped her course handily for the harbour-mouth, booms crashing to port as the red eye swung to bear on Coast. As she drew abeam he could see her deck quite clearly, glistening in the white glare that threw the scurrying figures of the

crew into clear black relief. They went about their tasks adeptly, sure-footed and alert, with a curious detachment of attitude, having no regard whatever, apparently, for that which held Coast spell-bound.

In the waist two men were struggling, locked in one another's arms and staggering, now this way, now that, neither uttering a sound. At that distance, they seemed fairly matched, neither conceding to the other anything of spirit or of determination. They fought strongly, each with a passionate concentration of effort, each in silence. This circumstance impressed, that men should fight so without a word or a cry; taken in conjunction with the weird illusion of the hour, the disinterested aloofness of their fellows, the ferocity of their strife, it created an effect of unreality, fantastic and abnormal, like war of shadow-puppets on a screen. Yet the audience of one hung breathless on its issue, as if he himself, his fortunes and his fate were involved.

He saw one suddenly give way, as though his foot had slipped. He went down upon a knee, the weight of his antagonist heavy upon him, and recovered only with a tremendous and convulsive effort, but now with his hold broken and at the other's mercy. In half a dozen breaths he was rushed to the rail (where he attempted futilely a last stand),

forced backwards over it and so held. A fist was lifted above him and fell like a hammer. There followed a splash, but no outcry. The man went under like a log. The schooner slipped onward with growing impetus, sails bellying luminous. No life-preserver was thrown, not a hand raised, not, so far as Coast could discern, a head turned to see the fate of the defeated.

As the vessel passed, he came up, a black dot moving spasmodically in a swirl of broken silver. He seemed to try to swim, but feebly, as if dazed, keeping on the surface only through instinct. He struck out, but indefinitely, without seeming to realise the direction of the shore. The tide carried him downstream, inexorably.

Loosening the draw-string of his pyjamas and ripping off the jacket, Coast leaped to the *Echo's* stern, poised himself lithely and shot out, cleaving the water almost without a splash.

He experienced a sense of diving headlong into a black, bottomless pit, with an effect of blindness as he came up, the moon in his eyes; the shock of immersion in waters little less than icy came an instant later. Electrified, he got his bearings and directed himself for the struggling man, with a feeling of keen pleasure as the fluid slipped smoothly from his bare limbs and body. Warmth came of exertion; refreshed, invigorated, he swam with

swiftness and strength, concerned only to reach his goal before the man could sink finally. At length winning to his side, he held off warily, watching for a chance to close in and at the same time escape the clutch of those valiantly thrashing arms.

"Now, now!" he cried, as one might strive to soothe a restive horse. "Easy, there! You're only tiring yourself out."

The splashing ceased in some measure, the man wiggling awkwardly round to bring the source of that voice within his range of understanding. "Lord!" he said, breathless. "*You're* welcome."

Encouraged by this note of sanity, Coast swam nearer. "Need any help?"

"What do you think?"

The moderate exasperation of this reply educed a spontaneous laugh from Coast, which he checked abruptly as the other man again went under, to an accompaniment of frantic kicks and splashes. Before Coast could reach him he re-emerged, blowing and spluttering.

"Beastly tasting water," he commented between gasps, resting.

"What the devil are you trying to do?"

"Get rid of these damnable trousers: they won't let me swim."

"If I lend you a hand, will you——"

"No; I wont grab you. I know the answer to

that, and I've had one slam between the eyes already. Come along and be a hero, why don't you?"

Coast chuckled as he ranged alongside. "Put one hand on my right shoulder," he advised, "and keep as still as possible. I'll do the swimming."

"You're the doctor." The man followed his instructions promptly. "Sorry to trouble you, though."

"That's all right . . ."

"It's these infernal clothes. I can swim, without them. Ever try to disrobe on the bed of the sea?"

Coast ploughed forward slowly, husbanding his breath. They had been carried a little distance down-stream, and he had the current against him in addition to the heavy handicap of the inert body. Nevertheless he was making perceptible progress toward the *Echo*.

After a time, in a reflective tone, "Me for the Demon Rum after this," came over his shoulder. "I never knew water *could* taste so vile."

Coast made no reply; apparently none was expected. Laboriously gaining to the side of the cat-boat, he clung to it, panting, while the other considerately transferred his hold. Hanging so, he rolled an inquiring eye to his benefactor.

"This occasion," he observed, "is quite too unique. Never have I met a man I liked so well, under similar auspices. Permit me: my name is Appleyard, Chris-

tian name (from the Old Testament) Melchisedec—kindness of sponsors in baptism. Please don't look like that: I regret it, likewise."

He paused, watching Coast gravely. "Melchisedec means 'king of righteousness,' but don't be alarmed; mistakes will happen even at the baptismal fount. . . . And you, sir?"

"Coast—Garrett Coast."

"Congratulations: that has a human ring. And I am pleased to meet you. None the less, I owe him no gratitude who cheats me of a watery grave to freeze me to death. Upon my word of honour (whatever that may be), I cannot move . . . anything except my jaw."

Laughing, Coast scrambled aboard the boat, and leaning out caught the man beneath the arms. After considerable exertion on the part of both, he tumbled into the cockpit and incontinently, with a heavy sigh, collapsed on the deck, in a dead faint.

In alarm his rescuer dived below and returned with towels and a bottle of brandy. The latter being immediately resorted to, brought Mr. Appleyard back to consciousness. Coughing and choking, he struggled to a sitting position, and so remained while Coast fetched a cup containing a little water generously diluted with the spirits. This Appleyard swallowed at a gulp.

"Very good stuff," he commented, half-strangled.

"I had a premonition that my season-ticket on the water-wagon had run out. . . . I assure you I swallowed a cubic foot of Fairhaven harbour; *all* my insides are insulted."

"Get up," said Coast, "get those clothes off and dry yourself. I'll lend you a blanket and a berth for the night."

"With all the pleasure in life!"

Assisted by Coast, the man rose and stripped off his sodden garments, then rubbed himself aglow with the coarse towel. "That's better," he gasped, in the end; and, "What the dooce you staring at?" he demanded indignantly. "I know I'm a stunted skeleton. But what of that?"

"I beg your pardon," said Coast soberly. "It was unintentional. I had no idea——"

"Nor I, until I demonstrated it a possibility, that a man could be a rack of skin and bones and still survive. The boon you crave is granted, Mr. Coast: I pardon you freely, with lively anticipations of the blanket yet to come."

Coast took him down into the cabin, assigning him the starboard berth. "I trust you'll be comfortable," he said, with a solicitude not unmixed with wonder that so much fire and fortitude could inhabit a frame so frail and slight.

"Sure to be." Appleyard rolled himself luxuriously into his blanket and breathed deeply of his con-

tent. "But how can one feel at ease . . . who strolls stark-naked . . . aboard a perfect stranger's . . . private yacht . . . and—*eyah!*—makes himself at home without . . . so much as by your leave . . . ?"

"Don't——" Coast started to reassure him.

He was interrupted by a slight but unquestionably sincere snore.

V

SUNLIGHT and shadow playing in swift alternation upon his face, as the *Echo* courtesied to the morning breeze, Coast awakened.

For a moment almost thoughtless he lay drowsily enjoying the rise and dip of the boat, as drowsily conscious of a faint thrill of excitement: mostly comparable, perhaps, to the first waking sensations of a fourteen-year-old boy on a Fourth of July morning.

Then without warning the small chronometer on the transverse above his head rapped out smartly two double-chimes—ships' time: four bells: ten o'clock in the forenoon.

Astonished, he sat up quickly, and his still sleepy gaze, passing through the companionway, encountered the amused regard of the *soi-disant* Melchisedec Appleyard. Promptly Coast found himself in full possession of his faculties. That in obedience to first instincts he nodded with a cordial smile, was significant.

Appleyard returned the salutation with a quick bob of his small head. "Good-morning, hero!" he sang out cheerfully.

He sat in the cockpit, huddled into the folds of a

grey blanket, voluminous for his slight figure, a thin but wiry forearm bared to wield the cigarette he was smoking with every indication of enjoyment. A dense blue space of sky behind him set off effectively his bird-like head thatched thinly with sparse strands of pale yellow hair. Coast remarked primarily the alert and pleasant eyes of faded blue, looking out of a face faintly burned by the young summer sun, secondarily the thin-lipped mouth with its drooping twist on one side, eloquent of much humour. These, lightened by an indefinable gleam of indomitable spirit, moderated by a suggestion of sensitive intelligence and breeding, endowed the man with an individuality which Coast thought infinitely engaging.

"Good-morning," he returned. "How d'you feel after your adventure?"

"Unclothed but in my right mind," said Appleyard, with a twinkle of anxiety amending: "to the best of my knowledge and belief." He indicated airily the various articles constituting his painfully simple wardrobe. "Waiting for 'em to dry. Otherwise"—a claw-like hand clutched jealously the folds above his bosom—"I'd've changed my act: the rôle of Squaw Man likes me little; it jars upon my temperament to play it without a pipe. On the other hand, I commend your taste in cigarettes. Goaded by poignant pangs of starvation, I foraged

for 'em and have breakfasted famously on a round half-dozen."

"We'll do better than that presently," said Coast, pulling on his clothes.

Appleyard hopped up, fingered his everyday attire critically, and pronounced it bone-dry; then, bundling it up, he returned to the cabin, seating himself on the opposite transom to dress.

"And the sensations of a hero, refreshed by sound slumbers, are——?"

"Hunger," said Coast. He moved forward and began to experiment gingerly with a new and untried alcohol stove. "I can offer you eggs, coffee, biscuit—and nothing else," he added, producing raw materials from a locker. "You see, I hadn't expected to entertain."

"Rotten inconsiderate of you," Appleyard grumbled. "I'll wire you a warning next time it occurs to me to drop in unexpectedly. . . . By the way, you saved my life, d'you know?"

"Oh, here now!" Coast protested.

"Don't shy; I merely want to explain I've already cancelled the obligation by saving yours."

Coast stared. "How?"

"By shooing off your acquaintance, Huxtable. He rowed out a-purpose to talk you to death, and incidentally to find out what I meant. Sighting me from the dock, he was naturally frightened: seemed

to regard me as some unhandsome sort of changeling, and wanted to come aboard and assure himself of your safety. So I had to get rid of him."

"How did you manage that?"

"In the most gentlemanly way imaginable." Appleyard's lips twitched. "I begged him to get the hell outter here and mind his own business. Absurdly enough, the ass did."

Coast lifted the wings of a folding-table built in forward of the centre-board trunk, set it with cups and plates, and turned again to his stove.

"How do you like your eggs?"

"Not at all, as a rule. In the present instance, however, rather than cause you embarrassment, I will gracefully make an exception. My impression is that eggs have a depressingly monotonous similarity of flavour, whether scrambled, poached, shirred, fried on either or both sides, boiled two and three-fourths or fifteen minutes, served as an omelette or *à la Béchamel* . . . But I fear I bore you. Your preference, sir, is mine. . . . How I do rattle on!"

"Don't you!" said Coast agreeably.

Divided between amusement and perplexity, in the course of the meal he reviewed a personality singularly enriched by a variety of suggestions consistently negative. Mr. Appleyard's clothing was nondescript and reticent, comprising an ill-fitting

coat with trousers of faded shoddy belted in with a leather strap, a flannel shirt morbidly blue, and cheap canvas shoes with thin, well-worn rubber soles—the kind of footgear known widely as tennis sneaks. This simple costume masked a body little over five feet long and almost painfully emaciated, which he carried with a slight stoop, the head a trifle lowered. His hands were lean and bony, neither soft nor too white, yet clean; not a sailor's hands, nor yet a vagabond's. The man's age was indeterminable—somewhere between thirty and forty-five. Loosely summarised, he might have been anybody or nobody on a lark or his uppers. An indubitable enigma Coast found him as their acquaintance progressed: comprehensible bodies wear some indications of their origin and vocation, do not alternate an appallingly voluminous English vocabulary with abrupt digressions into the slang of a dozen widely separate localities; neither are they uncannily perceptive.

Appleyard looked up quickly, with a shy, humorous smile.

“Well, what d'you make of me?”

“It's hard enough to guess what you've made of yourself.”

“Flattery note,” observed Appleyard obscurely.

“Yet you win my sympathy; sometimes I am moved to wonder—really.” He tapped an egg thoughtfully, a crinkle forming between his colourless eye-

brows. "It's really not what a man makes of himself: it's what his temperament does to him."

"Temperament!"

"Yes; you really ought to keep one, too; they're all the rage just now—and such excellent excuses for the indulgence of your pet idiosyncrasies."

"Oh! . . . And you blame yours for what?"

"For making me a—I presume posterity, in the final analysis, will adjudge me a Romantic."

"Literature?" asked Coast, aghast.

"Good Heavens, no! Nothing like *that*: Life." He sighed profoundly. "Shall I rehearse to you the story of my life? No, I shall not rehearse to you the story of my life. But at all costs I shall talk about myself for a space: I insist upon it: I love to. You don't seriously object?" he added, anxious.

"Then compose yourself. . . . Born at an early age—in fact, at as early an age as you can comfortably imagine—I found myself immediately the sport of sardonic fortunes. That name, Melchisedec! One felt that there must be in one's future life some warmth of Romance to compensate for that infamous ignominy. So labelled any reasonable human should logically have looked forward to sure degeneration into the American peasant of the New England magazine-story type, *sans* brains, bowels, breadth, beauty. A born iconoclast, however, as soon as I

wakened to realisation of my plight I mutinied and resolved to live down my shame. Thenceforward I set myself to painstaking muckraking in modern life, seeking the compensating Romance without which life were but death in life." He paused and cocked an eye at Coast. "Not bad for a beginning, what?"

"A little prolix," commented Coast dispassionately, falling in with his humour. "But continue. You found your Romance?"

"What is so-called—alas, yes! I found it, as a rule, a *nom de guerre* for crime. . . . Lured by legend, I have traversed much of the known world, only to come to that conclusion. I have penetrated the fastnesses of the Tennessee mountains, nosing the illicit still: which proved merely sordid. Counterfeiting seemed to promise largely—and discovered itself the most ill-paid calling in the world. Diplomatic intrigue unmasked proved to be merely a popular fallacy shining in the reflected lustre of the Six Best Sellers. . . . But I refrain from wearying you with a catalogue of the exploded mines of Romance; a list inordinately lengthy, believe me. High finance, I admit, escaped my probe; but the recent plague of Wall Street plays discouraged me, demonstrating there could be no Romance there. . . . So at length you find me turning in despair to the Seven Seas: afloat, at all events, one must of necessity pur-

sue the glamorous promise of the Unknown that lurks just down the horizon."

Appleyard paused, his mien subdued, his gesture bespeaking resignation.

"All of which means——?" Coast insisted.

"I hardly know. Frankly, I thought that speech rather stupid myself. That's why I chopped it off.

. . . One talks. . . . You may have noticed?"

"I have," said Coast drily.

"You would, naturally," returned Appleyard without resentment. "But would it amuse you to learn how I came to be on board that fisherman?"

"You mean how you came to be overboard. . . . Perhaps it would. You're the best judge of that."

"True." Appleyard accepted and lighted a cigarette, frowning soberly. "It was," he began, "due principally to my fatal passion for this Romance thing, sir. I have already acquainted you with my determination to pursue my quest of that shy spirit upon the trackless ocean. Conceive, now, the bitterness of the disappointment which o'erwhelmed my ardent soul when I applied for a berth as a foremast hand, only to be informed I was physically unfit, that, as one brutal mate phrased it, I'd blow away in the first half-a-gale. . . . I give you my word, Mr. Coast, I've been sticking round this waterfront a whole fortnight, vainly seeking nautical employment. Last night, for the first time, for a few brief

hours, I was permitted to flatter myself that fortune was on the point of favouring me. For a fugitive moment I sipped the chalice of Romance and rolled its flavour beneath my tongue."

Appleyard half closed his eyes and smacked his lips, his expression one of beatific bliss.

"You've a pretty taste in pleasures," Coast commented.

Appleyard waved the interruption aside. "It came about largely through a whim of Chance," he resumed, "as all true adventure must. Quite by accident I fell in with one of the crew of that fishing smack, he being well under the influence of liquor; in a way of speaking, he'd looked too long upon the wine when it was red-eye and half wood-alcohol. Craftily simulating a like condition, I plied him further and succeeded in learning the name of his vessel and the fact that she was expected to sail with the morning tide—together with other details that intrigued me. Then, leaving the sodden wretch to sleep off his disgusting debauch, I caused myself to be conveyed aboard the lugger—I mean schooner—and stowed away in his bunk, trusting to luck to avert discovery until the morning. Unhappily I, with the rest of the crew, was routed out incontinently by an unmannerly brute with a belaying-pin (at all events it felt like a belaying-pin—an instrument with which I am unacquainted save through the literature of

the sea) and forced to go on deck to help heave anchor. . . . Or should I say, 'weigh anchor'?"

"I'm not quarrelling with your style," chuckled Coast. "Why not put off polishing your periods until another time?"

"Thank you," said Appleyard gratefully. "To resume: My detection promptly ensued and my presence was dispensed with, a trace unceremoniously, perhaps, but no doubt very properly from the skipper's point of view. With the subsequent phases of this most delectable adventure you are familiar; therefore, I confidently assume your concurrence with my conclusion; which is—here am I. . . . Now," he wound up, inclining his head at an angle, and favouring Coast with a frankly speculative stare, "what are you going to do with me?"

Coast opened his eyes wide, with a lift of brows. "I don't know that I contemplate doing anything with you, Mr. Appleyard."

"It's not yet too late for the amende courtoise," suggested his guest.

"I'll gladly set you ashore——"

"Pardon, but that's precisely what I don't want you to do."

"But——"

"A moment's patience, sir. The *Echo* lacks a crew: I offer my services unanimously in that capacity."

"But I don't want a crew."

"Oh, *don't* say that!"

"And I have no need of one."

Appleyard lifted both hands and let them fall with a gesture of despair. "Infatuated man!" he murmured, regarding Coast with commiseration.

"Why infatuated?"

"What do you know of these waters?" the little man counterquestioned sharply.

"Little," Coast was obliged to admit; "or nothing, if you insist."

"And yet you say you 'don't need a crew!'"

"But, my dear man, I do know how to sail a boat; and with a copy of the Coast Pilot, charts, a compass and common-sense——"

"You may possibly escape piling her up the first day out—granted. On the other hand, I happen to be intimate with these waters; I can pilot you safely whither you will; I can afford you infinite assistance with the heavy work—it's no joke, at times, for one man to have all the handling of a craft of this size. I'm exceedingly handy, small and inconspicuous, neat, a fairish cook, and normally quite pleasant to be thrown amongst—never savage save when denied the sweet consolation of continuous conversation. Finally, I'm a great bargain."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I offer my valuable—nay, invaluable services, gratis, without pay."

"But why do you do that?" demanded Coast, blankly.

Appleyard executed an ample gesture. "Romance," he replied, sententious.

"Oh?"

A faint flush dyed the little man's cheeks; simultaneously he asserted some little dignity. "Am I to infer from your tone that you don't take my account of myself——"

"Shall we say 'seriously'?" Coast interposed with his disarming smile. "You'll surely agree that, as yet, I hardly know you well enough to be able to judge whether you're the Romantic you profess or just a plain romancer."

Somewhat mollified, Appleyard took to stroking his cadaverous jowls. "If you keep on talking in that stilted way," he remarked, with immense candour, "you'll grow as tiresome as I am—at times.

. . . Not only that, but that yarn of mine was fully half true."

"Of that I'm convinced."

"What shall I say, then?" Appleyard pondered aloud. "That I've taken a violent personal liking to you? That I find a definite pleasure in your society (you *do* listen wonderfully well, you know) and am moved by a desire to save you from the

perils of waters which you've never navigated? Or does that seem too rotten sudden? Certainly gratitude on my part 's not wholly preposterous, seein' as how you saved me from being extinguished because of my fondness for the nether garments of civilisation. . . . Do I impress you by any chance?"

"Hardly, I'm afraid. You see, I don't know you."

Appleyard's smile deprecated Coast's. "Granted that I may be a fugitive from justice——"

"It's not impossible," Coast conceded fairly.

The little man grinned cheerfully at the overhead beams. "I don't presume you'd take me for a burglar——"

"I haven't considered taking you at all, remember."

"Or a malefactor of great wealth——"

"An orator seems more plausible."

Appleyard's grin generated a chuckle, the chuckle a laugh outright. "A hit, a palpable hit!" he crowed.

"Who are you, anyway?" pursued Coast incautiously.

"I might put the same question to you, sir."

"To your prospective employer?"

The faded eyes twinkled. "As nearly won over as that, Mr. Coast? Decidedly my talents should have been devoted to spellbinding, as you so deli-

cately suggest. . . . But squarely, sir"—he grew momentarily grave and earnest—"I've been painfully truthful: my monaker is actually Melchisedec Appleyard, incredible as it may sound. I give you my word I'm an honest man; the law has no knowledge of or concern with me. I may be (I confess appearances so indicate) an also-ran of the last run of shad; my straits may be such that bed and board in return for my services for a few days would seem an undiluted blessing; I may possibly have an axe to grind concealed about my svelte young person. I stand, however, simply on my proposition. Let's chance it for to-day, at least: what d'you say? I assume you intend to set sail this morning? Well, then, if by evening you have wearied of my merry prattling, or if for any other reason you prefer to be alone, you have only to put me ashore. I ask no fairer treatment; and, besides, you may as well give in now as later; I'm a determined and tireless elocutionist."

For all his banter he betrayed not a little eagerness as he bent forward, scanning Coast's face.

His verdict was something deferred; Coast was actually and seriously considering the preposterous suggestion. The little man promised a diverting companion, who had proven such up to that moment; and there were dark hours when Coast needed diversion poignantly. Beyond question it would be

convenient to have somebody at one's beck and call, to stand a trick at the wheel or advise concerning dangerous waters. And, furthermore, Coast thought to detect in Mr. Appleyard's manner a something which lent more than a mite of confirmation to his hint that he needed food and shelter—if only temporarily. . . . Finally, one inclined to like the man for himself; his personality persuaded even when one realised the apparent silliness of yielding to his importunity.

In the end Coast nodded slowly. "I'll go you," he said, holding the other's eyes; "I'll take you at your word."

Relief shone radiant on the withered face. "Right you are, Mr. Coast!" cried Appleyard, extending a hand. "I promise you won't regret this. Word of honour, sir!"

"That's understood." Coast pressed the hand and released it. "And now let's get under way. I'm for bold water—Nantucket Sound to begin with. Can we make Vineyard Haven by nightfall, do you think?"

"With this wind, *via* Wood's Hole?" Coast nodded and Appleyard considered sagely. "Of course we can," he proclaimed. "But hold on—how about the tide?"

"Well, I confess——" Coast began, shamefaced.

"You forgot that? I told you I'd prove indis-

pensable, didn't I? You've got a tide book, of course?"

"There's an Eldridge in the rack just behind you."

"Excellent." Appleyard seized the book and thumbed its pages rapidly, muttering. "I was afraid so," he announced presently. "Against us all afternoon—and the stiffest tide to buck on this coast, at that. But wait a minute. *Umm. . . .* Yes, we can make it by way of Quick's Hole easily enough; that's quite another story: a bit farther round, but a safer channel. Satisfied?"

"I'm content," Coast laughed.

VI

“ALL ready?”

Coast, at the wheel, nodded to Appleyard, who was crouching in the bows. “Ready,” he said.

There followed a splash as Appleyard dropped the hook of the mooring at which the *Echo* had been riding overnight. The little man rose, ran nimbly aft, and jumped lightly down into the cockpit.

For an instant the *Echo* hung in the wind; then in obedience to Coast’s management of the wheel, she cast to port, and nosing the northwest breeze, gathered way and bored out to mid-channel.

“Easily now,” said Coast.

“Aye, aye, sir!” replied Appleyard, paying out the mainsheet steadily but jealously, inch by inch.

In a long and graceful sweep the *Echo* swung round and slipped briskly down the harbour to the urge of the following wind.

“Good little boat,” commended Appleyard, belaying the sheet while the catboat bowed graciously to a strong land puff and as readily recovered. “How’s her wheel?”

“Very comfortable—just enough pull to make you understand she knows her business, that this is as much work as fun. I like that kind of a wheel. . . .”

"Oh, she'll do, cap'n. I commend your judgment in picking her out. . . . Any orders, sir, 'fore I goes below to tidy up?"

"You might bring up the compass."

"Right-O!" The little man ducked into the cabin and bobbed back again with the portable binnacle, which he placed on the engine-pit hatch, where Coast could watch the shifting dial without trouble.

"Thank you. . . . Due south from Butler's Flats Light, you say?"

"Better say sou' by east. And hold her down and watch her walk across the bay. She's a lady, this one—or Melchisedec doesn't know boats from beans."

With this the wearer of that name returned to his self-appointed task of making everything ship-shape in the cabin.

Off Butler's Flats Coast laid the course by compass and trimmed the sheet to correspond. Then running free—the sail fat with wind—the *Echo* stepped out proudly, tugging at the wheel as a thoroughbred lunges at the bits. The pursuing wind was scarcely more fleet or light of foot than she; in fact, so nearly did the speed of each approximate that Coast was conscious of no movement in the air; it was crisp, exhilarating, delicious, but it seemed still. Steadying the wheel with his knees, he found and

filled his pipe and struck a match: the unguarded flame rose above the bowl with barely a flicker.

The *Echo* swept on, silent and swift, skimming the sea as lightly as a gull. Now and again the wind, freshening to a stronger gust, would cause her to luff like a headstrong colt shying to the roadside; at such times it required all Coast's might to bring her back and hold the course. He liked that; humouring her almost humanly joyous quirks and caprices, he laughed gently to himself, feeling they were in some sense akin, he and his boat; footloose both and fancy-free, with all time (as it seemed) at their command, a fair sky overhead, a fair wind to waft them whither their idle whims might list.

The sky, indeed, was radiantly fair and cloudless, only in the far southwest tarnished by a 'dim and dull, low-lying reef of haze. Sunlight crystal-clear showered molten gold upon the swinging waters and struck white fire from distant sails and the frosty crests that raced the catboat until, distanced, they fell back and broke with a brisk and stirring rattle that seemed, like the plaudits of a friendly audience, to incite the boat ever to fresh endeavour.

With a rapidity all but incredible to Coast, the mainland dropped astern, fading to a blurred bar setting apart the sapphirine waste of sky and sea. From the scuppers came a cheery gurgling, from beneath the bows a hiss, from astern the swish and purl

of the wake, and an occasional smack as the *Echo's* tender broke through a roller or came down heavily from a crest.

Bred of these all a spirited humour ran riot in Coast's mood; he felt as though wine were fluent in his veins instead of blood. Now and again he caught himself talking to the boat in an intimate undertone, as to a sentient being; and laughed softly at his own conceit. Once, even, he lifted up a strident, toneless voice and sang with immense gusto, unmindful of his audience below.

“I've never sailed the Amazon,
I've never reached Brazil;
But the *Don* and *Magdalena*,
They can go there when they will!

“Yes, weekly from Southampton
Great steamers white and gold,
Go rolling down to Rio
(Roll down—roll down to Rio!)
And I'd like to roll to Rio
Some day before I'm old.

“I've never seen a Jaguar,
Nor yet an Armadill—
O dilloing in his armour,
And I s'pose I never will,

"Unless I go to Rio
These wonders to behold——"

The "*beho-o-old*" trailed off brokenly, as if discouraged, as Appleyard re-emerged from the cabin and stood listening attentively, his head perked critically, until the wind had whisked away the last, long, lingering, cracked note.

Then, "What was that?" he inquired ominously.

Coast grinned sheepishly. "Something of Kipling's—set to music by some German composer, I believe. Why?"

"Only this," said Appleyard grimly, wagging a twig of a forefinger determinedly beneath Coast's nose: "it wasn't in the bargain. I shipped on this here vessel as general scullion and maid-of-all-work, but they wasn't nothin' said about any imprompty musicgales. That sort of thing may be soothing to your savage breast, but me, I'm civilised more or less. You keep it up and I warn you every man-Jack of your crew'll mutiny. You hear *me*."

"All right," Coast conceded with a tolerant laugh; "if that's the way you feel about it, I wont do it again."

In the beginning they had had to pick a way through a swarm of harbour shipping; catboats like the *Echo*; small sloop-rigged craft and knockabouts; pluttering gasoline tenders and larger motor-driven

pleasure boats; coal and freight barges swinging at anchor or lurching sluggishly in the tow of heavy tugs; coastwise schooners, two, three and four-masted, laden with thousands of feet of yellow lumber; a battered barque just in from the West Indies; slim and beautiful steam-yachts gay with bunting, awnings and fresh white paint.

Now they drew into more lonely waters. To the eastward a fishing-smack was drifting down the wind while her crew fished with hand-lines. Farther away a smudge of tawny smoke smearing the immaculate skies told of the morning boat from Nantucket picking its way through Wood's Hole. To starboard a staunch, grey old whaler with bluff bows and high freeboard was standing under full sail southwest for the Hen-and-Chickens Lightship and the open sea beyond: one of the few survivors of New Bedford's golden age, passing sedately and with a certain disdain an inward-bound tramp-steamer, rusty, weather-beaten and smelling to Heaven, fresh from a year-long cruise on whaling grounds where once the sail had reigned supreme.

Ahead the long line of the Elizabeth Islands was assuming shape and colour.

Early in the afternoon the wind began to fail, its volume diminishing by fits and starts; heavy puffs alternated with spells of steady breezing successively more faint.

Over the bows the entrance to Quick's Hole, the passage between Pasque and Nashawena Islands, became plainly visible.

Appleyard remarked the signs of change with a wrinkle of disquiet between his brows.

"Going to have a shift of wind, you think?" Coast asked.

The little man nodded anxiously. "It's a cinch," he asserted. "And when it does swing the chances are ten to one it'll come in from the sou'west. That's the prevailing wind round here at this season, you know."

"Well? Even so, it'll favour us up the Sound, won't it? Besides, we've got the motor. . . ."

"That'll help a heap in case that fog comes down on us, won't it?" Appleyard snorted in disgust, nodding toward the bank of tawny haze that discoloured the horizon beyond the low profiles of Nashawena and Cuttyhunk, over the starboard counter.

"Hadn't thought of that——"

"And yet you had the nerve to resent my suggestion that you needed a keeper!"

"Well then, it's up to us to make that passage as soon as we can—what? Hadn't I better get the motor going? Here, take the wheel, while I——"

"Never mind," Appleyard returned. "That's

my job. You stay put. That is, unless you prefer——”

“No; I’m not crazy about it. Go ahead and break your back turning up a cold engine, if you want to.”

“Don’t let that fret you any, Cap’n.” Appleyard grunted, setting the binnacle aside and lifting the engine-pit hatch. “Me, I was born and brought up with marine motors; they used to fill my nursing bottle with a mixture of gasoline and Vacuum A. Pipe your uncle.”

He dropped lightly into the pit, threw in both the main and shut-off switches, opened the globe-valve in the feed pipe, made a slight adjustment of the carbureter, and slowly turned up the fly-wheel. An angry buzzing broke out in the spark-coil.

“You see,” he said with elaborate nonchalance. “They’re all alike—any one of ’em will feed right out of my hand.”

He rocked the fly-wheel to and fro half a dozen times, then gave it a smart upward pull. Instantly there was a dull explosion in the cylinder, and the wheel began to spin steadily to the muffled drumming of the exhaust.

Gathering way, the boat moved at a more lively pace, with her sail flapping empty and listless and an idly swinging boom.

“That fellow Huxtable’s no such grafter as you’d think,” said Appleyard, lingering in the pit to make

a few minor adjustments; "this is some decent little engine. New, too—all the latest wrinkles; I'm strong for that thing of bolting the spark-coil directly to the cylinder-head, for one."

He climbed out, replaced the hatch and wiped his greasy hands complacently upon his trousers. "Not at all bad for a motor that's been cold Heaven knows how long," he continued, standing with an ear heedful of the deadened coughing, clicking and humming going on beneath their feet. "Runs like a sewing-machine. Am I a wizard? Who's worth his weight in gold? Little Melchisedec, sure's you're born."

And he proceeded with a business-like air to lower and furl the now superfluous spread of canvas.

By the time Coast, instructed by his highly efficient crew, had piloted the *Echo* safely through to the Sound, a dead calm held. To the south the Vineyard loomed, indefinitely distorted through the dance of heated air. Eastwards, on Lucas Shoal, a fleet of fishermen bobbed like toys, dancing with their pigmy images mirrored in the slowly heaving, glassy water. But even at that distance the dull detonations of their exhausts were audible as, one by one, they started homewards, flying before the threat of the fog.

"Too late," announced Appleyard dispassionately, watching them; "you're all going to get caught, you giddy procrastitutes."

A little later a chill breath of air fanned Coast's cheek, the first whiff out of the southwest. The waters flawed and darkened with the flying catspaws.

The fog swept in swiftly. Far across the breadth of wind-dulled water Coast could see it moving onward like a wall, momentarily gaining in bulk. Already it was hovering threateningly over Gay Head, and while he looked a thin, grey, spectral arm stole across the low land at Menemsha Bight and began to grope its blind way up the Sound.

Freshening slightly, the wind blew soft, steady and cool. Dreary, lustreless, colourless shapes of mist drifted overhead like wandering wraiths, dyeing the water with the hue of frosted silver. Over its surface balls of leaden vapour rolled, gigantic vanguards of the imminent, all-conquering host. A sea of mist amputated Gay Head from the main body of Martha's Vineyard; the headland itself stood out valiantly in its painted beauty but a little longer, then reeled giddily and was sucked under. Veil upon veil of vapour enshrouded the little fishing fleet. Cuttyhunk and Nashawena disappeared. Off the port beam Pasque was smothered; farther on Naushon faded and vanished. A cloud inexorable and impenetrable closed down upon the world and blotted out the sun.

Somewhere astern an ocean-going tug with a tow of three barges set up a frenzied bellowing; barge

answered barge hideously. Plaintively the fishermen bleated for mercy in two-score keys cacophonous. A near-by lumber schooner methodically punctuated the din with horn and bell.

"Noisy lot of beggars," observed Appleyard. "Fog scares 'em silly. You'd think they'd never been out alone before."

"Just the same, we'd better follow the fashion ourselves, don't you think?"

"Well, rawther, cap'n; if we don't we're apt to find ourselves quite in the swim, you know." The little man uncovered the motor and retarded the spark until their speed was less by half. Then he grasped a lever and tugged it wide. Up forward the chime whistle, operated by compressed gas from the exhaust, whooped a sonorous whoop, and so continued, under Appleyard's manipulation, "at intervals of not more than one minute."

Coast steered with his gaze fixed upon the compass on the engine-pit hatch, now his sole guide. Insensibly the fog grew more dense, so that in time the mast was more or less indistinct and only a yard or so of pallid water was visible on either hand.

"Vineyard Haven to-night, by any chance?" he asked suddenly.

Appleyard shook his head decidedly. "Not unless we get a breeze stiff enough to blow this off." He abandoned the whistle long enough to wet one hand

over the side, subsequently holding it above his head to determine the quarter from which the wind, if any, was blowing. "What there was has fallen," he announced. "Not a breath stirring but what we make ourselves."

"Then we'd better find an anchorage for the night?"

"Only thing to do. I'm willing to risk my valuable rep. as a weather prophet, that this won't lift before morning."

"Tarpaulin Cove?"

Appleyard pursed his thin lips and rubbed his nose, considering. "Good enough anchorage," he admitted; "but for muh, I ain't strong for it. Menemsha Bight would do us more comfortably—across the Sound, you know, a bit east of Gay Head."

"Why Menemsha Bight?"

"Because there's an able-bodied and energetic fog bell at Tarpaulin. Take my advice. There'll be nothing but dead silence at the Bight, and it isn't much of a run over there."

"You know best. How shall I hold her?"

"Sou'-sou'east."

"So." Coast put the wheel over and brought the *Echo* round to that course, as indicated by the compass.

Shortly after this the tug with her tows passed astern—judging from the racket of their whistles.

Long since they had lost the feeble piping of the foolish fishermen. Now, but for the muttering of the exhaust and the rumble and clicking of the motor, it was as if the *Echo* rode a silent and deserted sea, ploughing onward at a snail's pace through a world mournfully blanketed, grey, dismal and lifeless.

Upon the deck a thin and slippery scum of moisture appeared, and globules of water, wanly glimmering, stood out upon the bright-work and beaded thickly, as with false pearls, the furled canvas and the clothing of the two men.

Monotonously the chronometer in the cabin knelled the half-hours. About two bells (five o'clock) Appleyard began to fidget uneasily. He knocked out his pipe and, jumping up, trotted forward to the bows, where, an arm embracing the mast, he remained for many minutes stubbornly peering ahead into dreary blankness which the keenest vision could by no means have penetrated.

After a while he returned, discouraged, to the cockpit. "I don't like this," he asserted glumly. "There's something gone wrong. We ought to 've made the Bight over an hour ago. I've been expecting we'd run aground every minute of the last thirty. . . . Sure you've got the course right?"

"Absolutely," returned Coast with conviction.

"Then what the divvle's the matter?" grumbled the little man. "Martha's Vineyard hasn't moved,

I'll go bail; and we certainly couldn't hold that course as long as we have without striking land somewhere." He wagged a perturbed head, growling inarticulate dissatisfaction. "Let me think. . . . Something wrong . . . What . . . ? Wait!" he cried abruptly. "Maybe . . . Hold that wheel steady for a bit, will you."

Dropping to his knees he peered intently into the binnacle, at the same time opening the cut-off switch and disconnecting the batteries. The motor promptly coughed and was quiet, the droning in the spark coil died away, and Coast, leaning forward in wonder, saw the compass dial jerk as if suddenly released and then swing through an arc of almost ninety degrees ere it steadied.

"What in thunder does that mean?" he demanded, surprised to the point of incredulity.

"Means we're both asses of blooded lineage," said Appleyard sourly, rising; "though you're not a marker to me. I should 've known better—I'd 've thought of it right away if I had only half the sense God gives the domestic goose. That compass was right on top of the spark coil. Naturally it was magnetised. . . . And I would 've known better, too, if ever I had run an engine with the coil on the cylinder before! Oh—piffle!"

"Then I've been holding the wrong course for several hours."

"Prezactly."

"And you haven't any idea where we are?"

"Not a glimmer."

Thoroughly disheartened, Coast left the wheel.

"Nice mess," he observed quietly.

Appleyard sighed profoundly. "The worst of it is, I'm such a sawed-off little runt, too small for you to kick as I ought to be kicked . . ."

"Yes," said Coast.

He stared, discerning nothing but the dull violet opacity of the fog, now shaded by the approaching evening, hearing no sound other than the sighing of ripples widening from the *Echo's* flanks as she drifted with momentarily lessening momentum.

"I presume we couldn't tell anything from the tide," he said uncertainly.

"No," Appleyard replied in the same tone.

Coast tossed a scrap of cotton waste overboard and the two men listlessly watched it drift away upon the slick, oily surface water.

"That doesn't prove anything," said Appleyard.

"S'pose we anchor—what?"

"We may be in a fairway," Coast doubted.

"Don't hear any fog signals, do you?"

"No-o . . ."

"I'm going to try it, by your leave."

"No objection."

Together they went below and, lighting the cabin

lamp, routed out a light anchor and cable. Then, leaving Coast to fill, trim and set out the bow- and side-lights, Appleyard fished for bottom. In time he gave it up in disgust.

"No earthly use," he said, coiling the cable. "I let out ten fathom of this ding-blatted line, and nothing doing. This must be the ship-channel—with such depth—unless we've managed to run round Gay Head and out to sea. I'm clean off my reckoning. We'll just have to trust to luck and the whistle."

With this he jerked viciously at the whistle lever. The chime in the bows emitted a clear, sharp note some ten seconds in duration, then ran down the scale to a melancholy, throaty quaver, and expired in an asthmatic wheeze.

"Tank empty," said Coast. "We'll have to start the motor again to fill it."

"Aw, what's the use?" Appleyard contended. "We can't see to steer. Why make a bad matter worse by batting round blindly in the dark? I vote we eat now—I'm dying a dog's death of slow starvation—and afterwards I'll play a pretty little tune on that fish-horn down below."

"That's a pious thought," said Coast. "Come along."

They dined simply and solemnly on cold things, after which Appleyard, at his own suggestion, took

the first watch. "You need rest," he argued, "and I don't—rarely sleep over three hours a night. You turn in now and when your time's up I'll call you. There's nothing to worry about, anyway; we're perfectly safe unless we're in ship channel, which I judge we ain't from the absence of any whistling hereabouts."

Coast was really very tired and little loath to be persuaded. He dropped off instantly into dreamless sleep. . . .

At some time during the night he was disturbed by a heavy splashing under the bows. He roused just enough to appreciate where he was, and lay staring drowsily at the cabin lamp until (he seemed to have dozed off again and again awakened) he was aware of Appleyard's presence in the cabin.

"Hello," he yawned, staring at the little man's head and shoulders as he sat on the other transom, beyond the centre-board trunk, busying himself over something invisible in his hands. "What's up?"

"Sorry I waked you," returned Appleyard. His eyes flickered keenly over Coast's face for an instant. "We drifted aground a few minutes ago," he explained in a perfunctory tone; "I pushed off with the sweep and anchored with a short cable."

"Whereabouts d'you think we are?" Coast pursued sleepily.

"How should I know? Menemsha Bight for

choice, but it might be anywhere along the Vineyard Coast—possibly Pasque—or No Man's Land."

"What's that?"

"No Man's Land? Oh, a little island south of Gay Head, 'bout as big's a handkerchief. Practically uninhabited."

Appleyard rose.

"What you doing?" Coast yawned extravagantly.

"Cleaning my pipe. Go on and sleep; your time's not up yet."

"What's o'clock?"

Appleyard mumbled something incoherent as he stepped out on deck; and Coast turned over and slept again.

It seemed hours later when he found himself abruptly wide awake, in a tremor of panic anxiety bred of a fancy that a human voice had cried out in mortal terror, somewhere within his hearing. He started up, informed by that sixth sense we call intuition that conditions aboard the *Echo* had changed radically since the last time he had fallen asleep; and it seemed no more than a second from the moment his eyes opened until he found himself in the cockpit, glaring dazedly into the inscrutable heart of the fog.

At first, in his confusion, he could see nothing amiss. The *Echo* was riding on a quiet tide and an even keel, with scarcely any perceptible motion. The

encompassing darkness was intense, unfathomable, profound; only the forward light showed a dim halo of yellow opalescence near the masthead, and the faint glow from the cabin lamp quivered on slowly swirling convolutions of dense white vapour, like smoke. The port and starboard lights had been extinguished, as they should be when a vessel comes to anchor.

What, then, had interrupted his slumbers?

He turned with a question shaping on his lips. 'Appleyard was nowhere visible.

Coast required some minutes before he was convinced of the fact of the little man's disappearance. But the cabin proved as empty as the cockpit, and the tender was gone.

He swore with vexation. "He shouldn't have left the boat without waking me up. . . .

"Oh, well, it's all right. He's just run ashore to find out where we are. He'll be back before long."

He stretched, gaping. "Eh-yah! I'm stupid with sleep . . ."

The cabin chronometer interrupted with its quick, silvery chiming. The eight strokes, paired precisely, announced the hour of four in the morning. They seemed startlingly loud in the great stillness.

As their echoes died, as though they had evoked the genius of that place, a strange and dreadful cry

rent the silence, sounding shrill across the waters, yet as if coming from a great distance.

Eerie and eldritch, this goblin cry, like nothing human, rang through the hag-ridden night, fainted to a sickening quaver, and was no more.

So (Coast thought) might a lost soul wandering in the emptiness of damnation voice its fear, its anguish and despair.

VII

SOME moments elapsed, Coast's every nerve and sense upon the rack. Though he heard it no more, still that cry rang in his head, and he could but wait, smitten dumb and motionless, feeling his chilled flesh crawl, enthralled by fearsome shapes conjured up by an imagination striving vainly to account for what had happened—wait (it seemed) interminably; for what he hardly knew or guessed, unless it were for a repetition or some explanation of that inexplicable cry.

He received neither. His straining faculties detected none but familiar noises: the soft murmur of wavelets, a faint *slap-slap* of slack halyards against the mast as the boat lifted and sank upon a long, slow swell, the creaking of the rudder-head quadrant that lacked a touch of grease, even (he fancied) the hurried beating of his own heart: these and no more. But for such homely sounds, he might well have believed himself with the boat suspended in the nothingness of supernal night.

Insensibly he grew more calm. So silent was the world, seemingly so saturated with the spirit of brooding peace, that he was tempted to believe he had dreamed that first shriek, to which he had wak-

ened, and that the second was but an echo of it in his brain: some hideous trick of nerves, a sort of waking hallucination, to be explained only on psychological grounds.

And yet . . .

Appleyard? What of him? Was there any connection to be traced between his mysterious disappearance from the *Echo* and that weird, unearthly scream? Was there really land near, and had the little man found it only to become the victim of some frightful, nameless peril? Could that have been his voice, calling for help . . . ? And in what dread extremity . . . ?

In his agitation Coast began to pace to and fro in the narrow confines of the cockpit, stumbling over the hatchway, knocking his shins against the seats—two paces this way, two that—fuming and fretting with his concern for Appleyard.

There was nothing he could do, no way to reach the man. The tender was gone, the shore invisible—and who should say how far distant? Otherwise he would not have hesitated to swim for it. Besides, there remained always the impregnable fog. Even were he to find the shore, the fog would continue to prove an effectual blindfold—masking who knew what lurking dangers.

By main strength of will he composed himself to watch and wait. Seated with his back against the

cabin transverse, a cold pipe in his fingers, he remained in futile speculation, his eyes vainly probing the inscrutable opacity.

Presently it occurred to him to wonder where the *Echo* lay—off what land. Appleyard's responses to his inquiries, several hours back, returned to memory. The name, No Man's Land, intrigued. He interrupted his vigil to investigate such sources of information as he had at hand.

In the cabin again, with the lamp turned high, he dragged out a chart—number 112 of the admirable series published by the Coast and Geodetic Survey, delineating with wonderful accuracy the hydrography of Buzzard's Bay and Vineyard and Nantucket Sounds, together with the topography of the littoral and islands.

With pencil it was easy to trace the *Echo's* course from New Bedford harbour through Quick's Hole; a little to the east of which, say off Robinson's Hole, the fog had overtaken them. To the south and east of that point lay Martha's Vineyard, for all the world like a trussed fowl in profile. And there—yes, due south of Gay Head—was No Man's Land, its contour much that of an infant's shoe, the heel digging into the Atlantic. Comparison with the scale demonstrated it to be roughly a mile and five-eighths long by a mile wide—extreme measurements.

Coast stared at it with renewed interest, for the first time convinced of the existence of a spot so oddly named. A number of black dots along its northern shore seemed to indicate buildings—but Appleyard had distinctly said "uninhabited." Perhaps the Coast Pilot would shed more illumination on the question.

Consultation of that publication, however, added little to his stock of knowledge. He shrugged with disappointment, reading the single paragraph devoted to the island:

"About 5 miles S. from Gay Head is No Man's Land, a high, rocky, barren island, which is a prominent landmark from seaward. A couple of buoyed ledges lie between No Man's Land and the southwestern end of Martha's Vineyard. The south shore of Martha's Vineyard is unimportant and seldom approached by vessels, as it is out of the track of navigation."

Coast tossed the book aside in disgust. Insensibly, while he had pondered the locality, a conviction had taken form and grown in his mind that this land off which the *Echo* presumably rode, was No Man's Land. It seemed not improbable, considering the course they must have steered while the compass was under control of the spark-coil, that

the engine had been stopped somewhere off that ugly ledge of rocks known as Devil's Bridge, which juts out northwesterly from Gay Head. And, if such were the case, any southerly tidal current might well have carried the catboat down upon the curiously christened little island.

Imperceptibly, too, while he conned the chart and wondered, a cold glimmer began to temper the darkness; the soft glow of the cabin lamp turned garish in a wan, drear light, strange and mystical as moonshine. Dawn was at hand, a dawn as unreal and ghostly as the night that it relieved. To the spacious vacancy of the one succeeded the hollowness of the other: night fading while still the obscuration of the fog stood firm and dense as a blank wall.

Coast turned out the lamp and went back to the deck.

There was nothing to be seen, nothing to do. . . .

He fidgeted. . . .

Then out of the confusion of his temper, in which ennui stalked in singular companionship with perturbation, he chanced upon an odd end of thought, one of those stray bits of information, mostly culled from desultory reading, that clutter the back of every man's brain.

He happened to remember hearing, some time, some where, that fog rarely clings to the surface of moving water; that, by putting one's vision upon a

plane almost horizontal with the water, it is ordinarily possible to see for some distance roundabout.

"There may be something in it . . . No harm to try."

Forthwith he scrambled out upon the stern, from which, after some intricate manœuvring and by dint of considerable physical ingenuity, he managed to suspend himself, at peril of a ducking, with his head near the water.

He was promptly justified of his pains; the theory proved itself—in that one instance at least; between the slowly undulant floor, glassy and colourless, and the ragged fringe of the mist curtain, he discovered a definite space.

Directly astern and, roughly, some forty feet away, a shelving stretch of pebbly beach, softly lapped by low-voiced ripples, shut in the view. The *Echo's* tender, drawn up beyond the water's edge, bisected it.

"Good," said Coast, abstracted, recovering from his constrained position.

Curiosity gripped him strongly, caution contending vainly; he knew quite well that he would never bide content until he had probed for the cause and source and solved the mystery of that wild cry in the night just gone.

Moreover, he felt in a measure responsible for Ap-

pleyard. Surely there must be some strange reason for his protracted absence.

Abandoning himself, deaf to the counsels of prudence, Coast rose and stripped off his clothing.

He let himself gently into the water (fearing to dive because he did not know its depth) and found it warm—warmer than the air. He struck out cautiously, using the slow, old-fashioned but silent breast stroke. In two minutes, however, he was wading up to the beach.

There was no sign of Appleyard: only the tender. Upon that stone-strewn shore the feet of the runaway had left no trail. Though Coast cast about in a wide radius, he found no sign of the missing man. The pebbles scratched and bruised his unprotected feet, and he began to shiver with cold. He gave it up, presently, returned to the tender, pushed off and sculled out to the *Echo*.

Then, having rubbed his flesh to a blush with a coarse towel, he dressed, took the small boat back to the beach, drew it up and, now fully committed to an enterprise the folly of which he stubbornly refused to debate, set off to reconnoitre along the water's edge, feeling his way.

After a time the beach grew more sandy, and emboldened by the knowledge that he would have his footprints to guide him back, he left the water and

struck inland—but only to find his progress in that direction checked by a steep wall of earth, a cliff-like bluff of height indeterminable, its flanks wave-eaten and deeply seamed by rain.

At random, with no design, he turned again to his left and proceeded as before, but now along the foot of the bluff, trudging heavily through damp, yielding sand.

Still no sign of Appleyard.

He must have tramped, at a rude guess, several hundred yards before he discovered either a break in the bluff or any change in the general configuration of the shore. Ultimately, however, the one fell away inland and the other widened.

A moment later he came upon a small catboat careened above high tide mark, with a gaping wound in its starboard side, forward and below the water-line.

She lay stern to the water. Taking the point of her stem as his guide, Coast turned inland again, on a line as straight as possible considering the slanting lay of the land and the impossibility of seeing anything beyond a radius of a few feet.

Though by this time the day was much brighter—high dawn, he judged—there was as yet no hint of relief; the fog, its density no jot abated, seemed to cling palpably about him, like a garment—like the magic coat of invisibility of the fairy tales: a

cloak of confusion to its wearer, robbing the world of all semblance of sanity and order; so that he had a curious recurrent fancy that he moved in a sort of waking nightmare, groping a blind way through interminable oblivion. . . .

He had not gone far upon this tack before he stumbled upon a path of hardpacked earth, obviously made by human feet. Then he found himself mounting a rather steep grade, and in another moment was face to face with a plain weather-boarded wall of a wooden building.

There were no windows that he could discover on this side, and though he listened keenly he heard no sounds from within. It was with caution, none the less, that he picked his way through a litter of worthless rubbish—food tins, empty and broken packing-boxes, rags, a section of fishnet worn beyond repair, and the like—to the front of the house, and found an open door, through which he passed to a haunt of silence, desolation and decay. Mildew discoloured the walls and ceilings, where the plaster had not crumbled and rotted away, disclosing raw old ribs of lath and rafter; the staircase to the upper storey had fallen in upon itself; the windows lacked glass and yawned with broken sashes; the doors were altogether missing; an indescribable débris cluttered the flooring. . . .

The briefest review of these dreary and forlorn

premises more than sufficed; Coast got him to the open air again with all possible expedition.

A little farther on he found another structure lending encouragement to this theory that there must be human beings near at hand. This, likewise constructed of "frame," seemed indisputably a storehouse, boasting both doors and windows, the former locked, the latter boarded. Against one wall stood a long, rude table of plain planking, its top foul with the bleached bones and dried viscera of fish. And at one end of this rose a mound of rotting cod heads and tails.

Spurred on by avid inquisitiveness as much as by his deepening concern on Appleyard's behalf, he took his bearings carefully and moved on into the shrouded unknown.

Other buildings presented themselves successively, as like as peas to one another and to the first he had encountered: all peopled exclusively by the seven howling devils of desolation and their attendant court of rats—or so he surmised from sundry sounds of scurryings and squeaks.

He gathered that he was threading a rude sort of street, fringed on one side—to seaward—with the abandoned dwellings of what had apparently been a small fishing community.

"No Man's Land indeed!" he commented.

"Certainly lives up to the name, even if it's some place else. It begins to look as if I'd drawn a blank. . . . But Appleyard . . .?"

He was moved vaguely to liken the place to the Cold Lairs of the Jungle Books. "Only infinitely sordid," he mused, at pause: "lacking the majesty and the horror . . . Wonder had I better go back?"

As he hung in the wind, debating what to do, whether to press on or to be sensible, swayed this way and that by doubts and half-formed impulses, somewhere near, seemingly at his very elbow, certainly not twenty feet away, suddenly a dog howled. Long drawn, lugubrious with a note of lamentation, the sound struck discordant upon his overtaut senses, shocking him (before he knew it) to outspoken protest.

"Good God!" he cried aloud. "What——?"

His voice must have carried to the animal; he heard a whine, the quick padding of paws, and a huge Scotch collie bounded clumsily out of the mists, passed him within an arm's length, vanished and returned, whining and circling, nose to ground, as if confused and unable to locate him. He watched the animal, half-stupefied with wonder at its erratic actions; then unconsciously moved slightly. A pebble grated beneath his foot. The dog wheeled toward

him instantly and paused at attention, a forepaw lifted, ears pricked forward, delicate nostrils expanding and contracting as he sniffed for the scent of man.

"Here, boy, here!" Coast called softly; and the next moment had the animal fawning upon him, alternately cringing at his feet and jumping up to muzzle his legs and hands, as if they were his own master's.

"Good boy! Steady now! So-o, so!" Puzzled by this demonstrative reception, Coast bent over the animal, trying to soothe it with voice and hand. It was plainly in a state of high excitement and evidently deeply grateful for his sympathetic toleration. He caught the finely modelled head between his palms, lifting up the muzzle. "Come now," he said in a soothing tone, "let's have a look at you, old fellow. Good old boy—it's all right now—steady . . . Why, the poor brute's blind!"

For as its eyes rolled up he saw that they were blank and lightless, the irides masked with a film of white.

"Cataract," he said, releasing the dog. "That's why he couldn't see me. . . . I wondered . . . Hello, what now?"

Comforted and reassured, the dog had drawn away and resumed its mysterious circling, nosing the earth with anxious whinings. Abruptly it paused, tense,

lithe frame quivering, then made off at a rapid trot in the direction whence it had appeared. A moment later the heartrending howl wailed out again.

Almost unwillingly Coast followed, nerving himself against the discovery he feared to make. . . .

Half a dozen steps, and he almost fell over the dog. He recoiled with a cry of horrified consternation.

“Appleyard! . . .”

But it was not Appleyard.

On raw, naked earth in the middle of the rude village street, a man lay prone with one forearm crooked beneath his head, his other limbs repulsively asprawl. His head (near which the collie squatted, lifting its mournful muzzle to the sky) was bare and thickly thatched with reddish hair. The back of his neck and what was visible of one cheek were sunburned a vivid red. A peaked cap of blue cloth lay a foot or so away. His body, rather short and sturdily built, was clothed in a grey flannel shirt, blue cloth trousers of a semi-military cut—with braiding down the outer seams—grey socks and low-cut brown shoes, neat and nearly new.

Mute with pity and consternation, Coast dropped upon his knees beside the body and, overcoming an instinctive antipathy, turned the head and shoulders until he could see the face. Then he dropped it, shuddering.

The man had been murdered, foully slain by a means singular and unique outside the Orient. Deep buried in a crease round his throat Coast had seen a knotted loop of crimson silk whipcord—the bow-string of the East. Above it the face was a grinning mask of agony and fear, dark with congested blood; a face that, none the less—despite those frightfully shadowed, blurred and swollen features—had unquestionably once been comely in the youthful Irish way. The mouth, with lips strained back to show a blackened tongue clenched between teeth strong, white and even, had once been firm and humorous. The protruding eyes, now filmed with a cast of agony and terror, once had shone with a kindly, generous light. The brow was good, the nose well-shaped, the chin square and pugnacious.

Coast also remarked the man's hands; they were clean and shapely, the nails close trimmed: not the hands of a manual labourer.

He resisted a temptation to explore the pockets, swayed by a powerful repugnance to contact with dead bodies. Later, perhaps, when he had found Appleyard . . .

He rose and searched the ground for indications of a struggle. He found none. No confusion of footprints about the dead man showed on the damp earth. Apparently the victim had been taken from behind, without warning.

Irresolute, baffled, he lingered for another moment.

By his side the dog howled deep and long.

He turned, half-faint, and fled the place, bearing with him what he was not to forget for many a night: the picture of the blind dog mourning full-mouthed beside the crumpled, lifeless Thing that had been its master, there in that nameless spot of death and desolation.

The horror of it crawled like delirium in his brain.

"No Man's Land?" he muttered huskily . . .
"Land of devils . . .!"

VIII

"THERE'S no sense in this—none whatever!" Coast spoke for the first time in twenty minutes or so. "Where in thunderation am I, anyhow?"

He stood in thought, pursing his underlip between a thumb and forefinger, wits alert to detect the clue to his bearings that was denied him, for all that the fog had thinned perceptibly within the last third of an hour.

It was now as if he occupied the centre of a cloud-bound hemisphere between thirty and forty feet in diameter, within which objects were visible with passable clearness. But he considered the advantage of this improvement almost if not quite negligible, what the fog chose to disclose little or not at all informing. This much he knew and no more: that he was lost.

A beaten path, thin and straggling, wandered underfoot; to his right lay a breadth of lumpy ground covered with coarse grass and something resembling gorse; to his left ran the irregular brink of a bluff, beneath which vapour swam, impenetrable, hiding the beach and the grumbling tide.

Practically ever since he had turned away from

that frightful scene which he could not forget, he had been following this track, to his bewildered perceptions much as a fly might circumnavigate the rim of a saucer; for his sensations were those of one who strays blindfolded in a circle. Somehow the deserted fishing village had seemed to vanish bodily from the face of the earth at the instant of his flight; and what was infinitely more disturbing, his sense of locality had become so confused that, whichever way he turned, he found himself always ascending, as though he had stumbled witlessly into some cup-like depression from which it were only possible to escape by climbing.

Now, exasperated and discouraged, he halted, feeling himself a very pawn of Chance, delivered into the hands of that grim and impartial deity through his own egregious folly.

As from a great distance came the muffled mourning of the blind dog. Coast shivered. "I can't stand that," he said irritably, and plunged on in desperation.

Before him, presently, a wall started up out of the mist-bound earth, a low stone wall, grey where it was not green with lichen, and ran off inland, diverting the path to keep it company. Some distance farther on a second wall, counterpart of the other, intersected it at right angles. Here was a primitive stile. Coast climbed over and continued, fol-

lowing the thinly-marked, tortuous trail across a wide expanse of rolling, semi-sterile, treeless upland, thickly webbed with other footways.

He pressed forward steadily—doggedly, rather, for remain inactive he could not—if without haste, now mounting long rises, again descending to shallow hollows, where clumps of alders, elderberry and sumach clustered round small pools of muddy water. Near the edges of these latter he noticed the spoor of sheep; and once he passed a brace of ewes contentedly browsing.

By this time the sun was high enough to illumine and penetrate the mists with rays of heat and a bright, diffused glow. The atmosphere was gravid with humidity, the earth steaming like a damp cloth by a fireside. Notwithstanding the moderation of his pace, Coast perspired gently.

Unexpectedly a rail fence sprang up across the path. Beyond it a company of indistinct blurs uncertainly shadowed forth what he took, and what the event proved, to be a farmhouse with outbuildings.

Arms on the topmost rail, he summed up the promise of the place.

It reeked of homely peace: an atmosphere so far removed from the nightmare through which he had moved that he found it hard to comprehend. Within the fence the trampled earth was bare of grass, weeds fringed the enclosure, fowls strolled

clucking and pecking morosely in the sodden dust under the suzerainty of a dilapidated cock; a number of hencoops, a crude, unlovely cowshed and some farming machinery disfigured the immediate foreground.

Encouraged, Coast climbed the fence and addressed himself to the farmhouse, coming inevitably first to its main entrance, the kitchen door; which stood hospitably wide, revealing an interior untenanted but warm with recent use. In the range a fire was smouldering. The central table was cluttered with crockery and cooking utensils. On a chair a cat napped, complacent. The walls were spotted with calendars and pictures clipped from illustrated periodicals.

Coast did not enter, but moved round toward the front of the house, his footsteps noiseless on the sod.

By the corner he stopped as though he had run against an invisible barrier.

Ten feet distant a woman stood in the gateway of a fence of palings. Half turned away from him and more, so that only the rounded curves of cheek and chin were visible, she seemed absorbed in pensive meditation. One hand held the gate ajar, the other touched her cheek with slender fingers. She was dressed plainly to the verge of severity: a well-tailored tweed skirt ending a trifle above ankles protected by high tan boots; a blouse of heavy white

linen with a deep sailor collar edged with blue—sleeves rolled well above the elbow, revealing arms browned, graceful and round; for her head no covering other than its own heavy coils of bronze shot with gold.

Coast was conscious of a tightening in his throat producing a feeling of suffocation, of a throbbing in his temples like the throbbing of a muffled drum. In a trice he had forgotten everything that had passed up to that moment; even the haunting thought of the murdered man dropped out of his consciousness; he was unable to entertain the faintest shadow of a thought that did not centre about this woman, not a line of whose gracious pose, not a tress of whose matchless hair, not a tint of whose wonderful colouring but was more intimate to his memory than his own features.

She was—she had been—Katherine Thaxter.

IX

HIS first translatable impulse was to turn and make good his escape before she became aware of him. But, as if the shock of recognition had palsied his will, he remained moveless. Contending emotions, resembling the flashes of heat and cold of an ague-fit, alternately confounded and stung him to the point of madness. For the first time in days he had forced home to him all that he had sought to banish from his life: his memories, of his gnawing passion for the woman, of the black crime that had severed their lives. Seeing before him the one being in the world dear to him beyond expression, the one being irrevocably lost to him, he divined anew with bitter clarity the bridgeless gulf that yawned between them. With the resurrected realisation of this, he began to tremble uncontrollably; he seemed to see two women—the bride pledged to him by years of mutual if unspoken understanding, and the wife of the man who had put upon him a wrong so monstrous, so unspeakably foul that even to recall it seemed to vitiate the very air he breathed, eclipse the light of day, strangle within him every instinct of humanity. Once again, in that bitter moment, he drank the

hemlock cup of disillusion and felt himself racked by the death agonies of his every kind and generous and noble inclination.

Extravagant as these thoughts were, they seemed more real to him than life itself. . . .

It was inevitable that the woman should in time become sensitive to his proximity. Though wholly unaware of his approach, though thoroughly assured that she was alone, a feeling of uneasiness affected her. She resisted it subconsciously and strove to continue the line of thought which had engaged her; but without effect. Coast saw her stir nervously and shift her position. The hand that touched her cheek dropped to her side; she leaned more heavily against the gate-post; her bosom rose with a long inspiration of melancholy, and fell slowly as her breath sighed out. Then she turned her head, and threw a flickering glance toward the house; the shadow of his figure lay upon the boundary of her vision. She swung quickly to face him, suppressing a cry. Their eyes focussed to one another, his burning, hers successively a-swim with astonishment, incredulity and consternation. For a long moment, during which neither moved or spoke, while she grew pale and yet more pale and he flushed darkly, their questing glances crossed and recrossed like swords at play.

Predominant in that pause the comprehension

of change swept over the consciousness of each, like a great wave temporarily submerging all else; for their initial emotions were too many, too various and confused, to contend at first against this poignant recognition of the revolutions time had wrought.

From Katherine's eyes a woman's soul gazed forth, experienced, mature, inured to sadness, gently brave: where had been the eager, questioning, apprehensive, daring spirit of a girl. He who had suffered and lived could see that she in no less degree had lived and suffered since that evening when last he had seen her beneath the street lights, bending forward from the seat of her town-car to bid him farewell. Life is not kind: Life had not been kind to her. If he had endured, she likewise had endured, in another way, perhaps, but in no less measure. She, too, had seen the splendid tapestry of her illusions rent to tatters by Life's implacable hand.

For this one man alone was answerable—Blackstock.

Of a sudden, on the echo of that name in his brain, Coast's hatred of the man, the animosity that had hardened to inexorable enmity in the crucible of his passion, recurred with ten-fold strength and nearly overmastered him. It is only the ruin their own deeds have wrought that men can view complacently.

He stepped forward a single pace, with an uncon-

scious gesture as one who tears from his throat that which hinders free respiration. "Where," he demanded without preface or apology, in a voice so thick and hoarse he hardly knew it for his own—"Where is he?"

He saw her recoil from his advance, but whether from fear or repugnance he could not guess. When she replied it was with evident difficulty.

"He?"

Impatient, he waved aside what seemed a palpable quibble: she must know very well what he meant. "What are you doing here, in this place, alone? Why did he leave you here?" He moved nearer, his voice rising to vehemence. "Why are you *here*, Katherine?"

She drew back again, passing through the gateway, so that the fence stood between them. He comprehended dully that she did this through fear of him.

"I might ask as much of you."

"Of *me*?" Her quietly interjected remark threw him momentarily off his line of thought.

"Yes, of you," she replied quietly, quick to see and take advantage of his distraction. "How did you get here? And why?"

"By boat," he returned stupidly, only irritated by this persistence in raising what to him, in his humour of the moment, seemed trivial and in-

consequent issues—"my boat. We got lost and ran aground in the fog last night. I came ashore to try to find out where we were."

"Then you have escaped!" She went directly to the sole explanation of his presence there that lay within her understanding.

"Escaped?" He shook his head, not in negation but testily. "Yes, of course; or I shouldn't be here." It was plain enough to him that he had escaped the fate to which he had been sentenced. To what else could she refer? "But you—he—that dog Blackstock—I want to know——"

"Garrett!" she cried sharply; and he fell silent beneath the challenge of her eyes. "Mr. Blackstock is my husband. Please," she continued, more gently, "don't forget that."

"Is it likely?" he sneered. "But where is he? What made him leave you here?"

"Garrett!"

Her tone should have warned him, but he was able to see but one thing, the conclusion to which his reason, spurred by his inclination to credit the worst to the man, had jumped the moment he realised her existence in surroundings so foreign to her kind: that Blackstock, true to type, having persuaded Katherine to their clandestine marriage and gained his end, the control of her little fortune, had abandoned her even as he had abandoned Dundas, even as

he would have discarded an old shoe or anything that had served his purpose and worn out its usefulness to him, leaving her to languish in this forlorn and desolate spot, out of his way and out of the world's way. . . . He hesitated to collect his wits, then pursued doggedly:

"Tell me where to find him," he said, his voice shaking—"give me the least hint to go by, Katherine, and I'll—I'll hunt him down, wherever he may be, I'll bring him back, I'll . . ." In his agitation he verged on incoherence.

Quietly but effectively the woman brought him to his senses. "I shall have to ask you not to continue in that tone," she said with disconcerting dignity. "You must not misconstrue matters arbitrarily to suit your prejudice. My husband has not left me, as you insist; there is no need for you to contemplate 'hunting him down.' He is here."

"Here!" Involuntarily Coast's glance veered to the house, suspicious and alert.

"On this island," she affirmed.

"What island?" he demanded, turning back to her.

"No Man's Land."

He accepted this confirmation of his conjecture with an inconclusive, "Oh?"

"You didn't *know*——?" she asked, incredulous.

"How should I know?"

She watched him, distrustful. "You didn't come here on purpose . . .?"

"It was chance," he asserted. None the less an unformed suspicion involving Appleyard crossed his mind. He considered, rejected and forgot it all in a breath.

"We bought the island last spring . . ."

"Yes," he said listlessly.

Her nervousness drove her on in rambling, inconsecutive and unnecessary explanation: "After we returned from Germany, on account of Douglas's eyes. . . . He is quite blind, you know, and the shock of losing his sight almost prostrated him. He is permitted no excitement, no social life—just peace and such mental employment as his work affords. So we heard of this place, looked it up and bought it. The Standard Wireless people installed an experimental station for his use. But it isn't generally known—the vice-president of the company, one of his best friends, managed it all for us. The necessity for seclusion, you understand . . . Even the servants know him only as Mr. Black."

"I understand," he said in an expressionless tone. "And this"—he nodded toward the farmhouse—"is your home?"

"Not exactly." Already she was regretting the intimacy her breathless explanation had implied. She hesitated, seeming reluctant to continue. "We

—Douglas and I—occupy two rooms of the bungalow, where the wireless station is, up on the hill. There are no facilities for housekeeping, so we come here for our meals. The servants live here—and Mr. Power, my husband's assistant."

He looked away from her, avoiding her eyes, while the struggle for mastery of self went on within him. To make time, "You—you don't find it lonely?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"And yet—cut off from the world—I should think——"

"I have sufficient to occupy me," she interrupted. "And we're not wholly out of touch. A boat brings us provisions and whatever else we may require from New Bedford every week."

"You see the papers, then?" he asked with a trace of eagerness.

"No; they are prohibited—doctor's orders."

"And no one writes you?"

"Nobody knows where we are . . ."

"An admirable arrangement: I congratulate Mr. Blackstock," Coast commented—contemptibly, he felt.

She gave him a look of slow, withering scorn. "Do you think he fears you?"

"Me? O!" He laughed shortly. "Probably not."

"Why should he? We both know you too well to believe you would—repeat your mistake, in cold blood, for sheer revenge."

"My mistake?" he parroted blankly. "Oh, to be sure . . . No; hardly that." He waited a moment, noting how strained and tense she was. "Nevertheless," he added quietly, "I should like to see him for a moment."

"Is it necessary?"

"I should like to see him," he repeated.

"He— isn't here just now." She met his keen, questioning look with a proud lift of her head. "On the island," she continued, "but not here. He'll be back before long."

"Thank you," he replied evenly; "I'll wait."

"But Garrett!" She seemed to overcome an inward resistance and, re-entering the dooryard, stood near him, touching his arm with a gentle, persuasive hand, her eyes imploring. "Must you?" He nodded gravely. "But why—why rake up this buried grievance?" she protested. "Is it wise, right? . . . It's true, he testified against you. But what else could he do? You had your chance—he gave you your chance to escape, before the police came. After that, he had no choice. You shouldn't hold that against him, Garrett; if only you knew how he hated to take the stand against you, how terribly he felt it when you were convicted practically

on his evidence . . .! But now that it's all over and past remedy, wouldn't it be better not to reopen that old wound? Kinder, Garrett, and more generous . . . to me? You are free, can go where you will . . .” She broke off with an anxious thought: “The detectives don't know where to look for you?”

“What? No.” He laughed aloud, but mirthlessly. “Oh, no, I gave them the slip some time ago.”

“I'm glad. But now, please, Garrett, won't you give this up. . . .”

She said more, much more, continuing to plead with him in a fever of distress, able only to comprehend one thing, that she must somehow avert the encounter he desired. But her rapid, stumbling accents were all meaningless in his understanding, which seemed to reel, dumbfounded by this revelation of the incredible. She had said enough to bring him face to face with the hideous, infamous fact that she still held him blood-guilty, still honoured and believed Blackstock. He struggled to shake his wits together and think coherently, but to little purpose. All the world was mad and topsy-turvy—a mad, mad world, wherein all truth was false, faith was treachery, justice parodied, honour deep dishonour. For a little he felt that his reason hung in the balance, teetering between wild laughter and still

wilder tears. If man can be hysterical, Coast was near to it.

And Katherine, witness to his excitement as evidenced in the working of his features, his shifting gaze, his hands so tightly clenched that the nails (she thought) must be biting deep into his palms, saw presently that he no longer listened to her.

She ceased to speak and waited, hoping against hope for what she deemed the best.

He was (so ran her thoughts, distracted, like wild things in a panic) not reasonably to be held in strict account for his attitude toward her or for his actions. In such men as he there must inevitably be something lacking, something like an abiding consciousness of right and wrong, the ability to distinguish between them: that rudder of the soul. In simple charity she must accord him patience.

If her eyes told her he was more a man than the Garrett Coast of old (and she saw him now in the fullest flush of health and vigour, sun-browned, weather-seasoned, glowing with strength and vitality) her mental vision clothed him with an aura of abnormality like a shroud, awful and repellent. He figured in her sight a murderer, a man who could strike to death an unarmed and defenceless friend, for a trifle. Nothing might ever avail to erase that fact from her consciousness.

She regarded him fearfully, wondering whether

she were sorry for him for what he had undergone or glad for him that he had escaped the ultimate and shocking penalty of his wrong-doing; for if the long years of their association, both as boy and girl and man and woman, had taught her anything about his character, he was not the sort to do evil dispassionately. She endeavoured, as she had ever, to condone his offence with the excuse of passion. But still he frightened her; she found his presence appalling; all the while her heart was fluttering frantically, like that of a bird menaced by the wheeling shadow of a hawk. . . . Curious it was to reflect that she had once been fond of him, that the time was not so far distant when she had shyly contemplated the thought of marrying him. She shrank now in affright from that memory. . . . More curious still to discover that she was still a little fond of him, in some strange, tremulous fashion—while yet she was shuddering to think that, but the moment gone, in the intensity of her pleading, she had forgotten and put her hand upon his sleeve! The fact affected her with a faint disgust, as if unwittingly she had touched some foul creature of darkness. . . .

Unconsciously she drew a pace or two away. The action roused him. He lifted to hers haggard eyes set in a haggard face; and their look was one of discernment. She knew instinctively that he divined her thought, that he knew why she had drawn

away from him. And so pitiful he seemed that before she knew it her mood melted and knew only compassion for him.

"Oh, Garrett," she cried impulsively, "I am so sorry!"

Visibly he took command of himself. "I'm sure of that," he said slowly; "and I don't want to distress you. My coming here was pure accident, as I've said; and presently I'll go and . . . Blackstock need never know I've set foot on the island—since you wish it."

"Oh," she cried, half sobbing, "thank you—thank you!"

"But first I want you to tell me one thing."

"Yes—anything!" she promised gratefully, heedless of his sober scrutiny.

"Are you happy?" he demanded forthright; and held his breath, for on her answer everything he prized depended. "Are you happy with him—Blackstock?"

It was like cold water in her face. She gasped and drew herself up, straight and slim, defiant. "What right have you to ask me that?"

"None but that of a man who loved you once, and who, though he may not, loves you still—whatever you may think him, Katherine."

She held her answer, quivering with indignation. That he should dare——! Yet there were two

things in his attitude to calm her: an impersonal note, puzzling, and a simple dignity that left little foothold for resentment.

As for Coast, momentarily while she did not reply, the issue hung in the balance, whether he should speak or no: whether enlighten her forthwith or leave her (were she happy in her marriage) in her fool's Paradise. He felt himself a prey to discordant impulses, pride and generosity counselling him, each with a double tongue. *Pride* said: She believes you guilty; she drew her skirts aside from you as from the plague; speak and clear yourself. *Generosity* said: She should know the truth; you have no right to withhold it; it is your duty to speak. *Pride* again: She would not believe you; she never loved you; be silent and the day shall declare your innocence and bring her to you craving forgiveness. *Generosity*, finally: She may be happy: leave her in peace. . . .

He felt suddenly very weary and sick of all connected with the death of Van Tuyl, willing to wash his hands of it all and try to bury the memory. Why not? He was free, responsible to none but himself and his God. Of what avail to denounce Blackstock and deliver him up to justice? Would that right any wrong? The world was wide before him; somewhere, somehow he would ultimately find peace—of some kind. Why not let matters rest

as they were? Would it heal his hurts to prove his innocence to this woman in whose heart he had no place? . . .

"I hold your happiness above all else," he resumed as the pause lengthened—"far above my own, Katherine. That is why I ask you: are you happy?"

"I have no regrets," she told him steadily.

"That doesn't answer me."

Her eyes wavered beneath his searching glance. She turned away and stared off into the vacancy of the fog.

"How is one to tell?" she said presently. "Isn't happiness difficult to define? A thing of comparative values? . . . I am content; that much I know. I have discovered something in life higher than the gratification of self; I have learned that to serve means more than to be served. I married the man I loved; he needs me now, could hardly do without me. I am a help to him in his work; he would probably be unable to continue it without my assistance. . . . I have my cares, as he has his, as you have yours. Who has not? . . . But a year is a long time; I have learned much since . . ." She took a deep breath. "Yes," she concluded evenly: "I think I may say I am happy, Garrett."

But she kept her face averted.

"And this?" he asked, stepping to her side and lightly touching her bare forearm with his finger.

Just below her left elbow four dark marks, like bluish stripes set close together, stood out like weals upon her delicate skin, where the flesh had been bruised by the cruel pressure of a man's strong fingers.

At his touch she recoiled with a half-stifled cry, her face blazing. "Don't——don't——!" she gasped, trying with faltering fingers to pull down the sleeve. But realising that it was too late, that he had already seen, she recovered, sullenly leaving the sleeve as it was.

"I'm sorry," said Coast soberly; "I didn't mean to touch you. I didn't think—had forgotten what—what I may not expect you to forget. Only . . . that is *his* mark, Katherine."

"Well," she flashed defiantly, "and what if it is? Is he, or am I, answerable to you? Can he not touch me . . ." But his undeviating and penetrating gaze disconcerted her; her anger rang unconvincing even to herself. "It was an accident," she finished lamely. "One of the servants angered him—they are Chinese and stupid—and in his blindness he mistook me for the man and caught my arm. . . ."

"It must have hurt," said Coast, trying to believe her.

She was silent, facing him with a trace of bravado. He bowed.

"I beg your pardon; it was, as you suggest, none

of my affair. I merely happened to notice, and it startled me. . . . Well, then, I'm going. Will you be good enough to tell me the way to the beach?"

Silently the woman indicated a path leading away from the gate.

Still he lingered, letting his eyes drink their fill of her; and knew, in a swift flash of certitude, that never had she been more dear to him than in this moment of renunciation, that never would his heart's allegiance waver from her, whatever her mood or circumstance. Whether she suffered him or as now sedulously discountenanced him, his queen could do no wrong. . . .

With a sigh, inaudible, he went to the gate.

"There's nothing I can serve you in, Katherine?"

"Nothing—only go away."

"Then good-bye." He shrugged slightly, lifted his cap and put himself outside the dooryard.

"But, Garrett——"

He stopped. She moved down to the fence.

"Garrett," she begged, breathless with the anxiety roused by an unsuspected latent fear, "promise me something"

He looked down into her sweet face, plaintive with appeal. "Name it," said he.

"If by any chance you should meet him—Douglas—I'm not sure where he is—don't, please——"

"I'll be careful," he assured her. "Don't worry;

I shant let him know who I am. If possible, I'll keep out of his way."

Her eyes were eloquent of inexpressible relief. "Thank you," she faltered, keenly alive to the trite inadequacy of the words. "And, Garrett, you're not—not angry with me?"

"Angry? With you!"

She was twisting her hands together. "I can't seem to forget," she said in a tremor. "I've tried—I only wish I might—but I can't, I can't. Remember that, if I seem unkind."

"You haven't been unkind to the man who shot Van Tuyl," he said, in spite of himself.

She did not seem to hear, or, if she heard, to read the riddle in his enigmatic answer. "It isn't that alone," she protested; "that, perhaps, I could forget in time. You weren't yourself: Douglas has always insisted you were not. But, O Garrett, Garrett! it was unmanly, it was unworthy of you to try to shield yourself by accusing him! That I can't forget, that I'm afraid I shall never learn to forgive. Why, Garrett, why did you permit that man Warburton to do it?"

He heard her out in pitiful patience, too deeply moved for anger or resentment to have any place in the conflict of his thoughts. But in the struggle going on within him while she spoke, almost without knowing it he lost grip of his determination

to hold his peace against a more fitting time—forever, mayhap; and when she paused, he spoke almost mechanically, with little more expression than he would have employed had he been called upon to propound a problem in mathematics.

“As to that,” he said, his tone colourless, “I would ask you to suspend judgment if you hadn’t already pronounced it. But I leave you this to consider: one of two men only could have killed Van Tuyl. Dundas we except by mutual consent; Blackstock admits and I admit he didn’t do it. There remain Blackstock and myself, neither of whom could have been convicted on the other’s unsupported evidence.”

“You are cowardly to say this to me, when he’s not here!”

But he had a level and emotionless look with which to meet the impassioned scorn she showed him.

“Perhaps; but don’t forget I asked only the opportunity to say as much to him. . . . Has it ever occurred to you that Dundas, not your husband, sent me to Sing Sing—that, had Dundas been in *my* pay, Blackstock would now be occupying the cell I occupied?”

He had himself well in hand. Otherwise she must have seen how deeply moved he was. Simply to watch her and not give way was almost more than he could endure. He saw her trembling and blanched, shaken wildly but quick with unquenchable disdain.

And he adored her so, would not for worlds have had her otherwise; though she despised him as the meanest of God's creatures and let him see it in her every look and gesture, he could have thrown himself down to kiss her boots, could have devoured with caresses those small, clenched hands whose knuckles showed so white beneath the skin. His love for her had never seemed so great, so overpowering as now. . . . His eyes kindled and his face blazed, and his heart ached—with his love for her, the longing that he must never voice. But she did not see.

She was answering him; her words came in a torrent, stumbling over one another: her voice vibrant with unutterable contempt sounded in his hearing like the hymning of angels. "Oh," she cried in loathing—"insufferable!" And the desire to catch her in his arms and stop her lips with kisses was like a pain. "I never dreamed that man could be so low, so vile!" she said; and he wished himself beneath the foot she stamped. "I hate you!" she told him; and beneath his breath he whispered over and over: "*I love you, I love you!*"

"I ask nothing," he said, when she had to stop, as much for lack of words as breath, "more than that you think it over. You've told me what you think of me—and I daresay you're somewhat justified. But think it over; you owe me and you owe yourself that. Weigh the worst you knew of me

before Van Tuyl was shot against what you have learned of Blackstock since you married him; then judge between us. Try to think which would be the more likely to lose his temper because of a drunken man's maudlin insolence. At best you'll admit it's his word against mine, Dundas's word deciding. And one way or another Dundas was a perjurer: first his testimony convicted me, then his testimony set me free."

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, impressed in spite of herself.

"Dundas," he explained patiently, "committed suicide in the Tombs a few days ago, after signing a confession that he had testified falsely at my trial. On the strength of that confession I was pardoned by the Governor. You understand?"

Her face was ghastly. "You bought that confession," she asserted between set teeth.

He smiled painfully. "I presume I might have anticipated that. . . ."

"You daren't deny you bought it!"

"From a man contemplating suicide?"

That silenced her. Her poor, distraught wits would frame no retort to his inexorable logic. Pulled this way and that by doubts, each more terrible than its fellow, she could no more than sway and stare at him with eyes blank in a face like parchment.

His heart bled for her in her misery. If he could

he would have unsaid all that he had said, to ease her suffering. "I feel like a dog," he told her contritely: "to have told you this . . . I meant not to, but . . . I couldn't help it. Think and . . . and judge between us, Katherine."

"It is a lie!" she wailed. "You have lied to me—everything you have said was lies—all lies. I don't believe you. . . . But you have poisoned my life for me! . . . Truth or lies: what am I to believe? . . . I am the most wretched of women, and you have made me so. Why couldn't you leave me in peace? Why must you have come to make me suffer so? How am I to know what is true, what false? . . . Oh, you are monstrous! You are cruel, cruel! If only you would go and let me forget! . . . Go, go, and let me be!"

In his remorse, reluctant to leave her so, he tried to comfort her with broken protestations that even he knew were rank with insincerity; nor would he willingly have gone before she grew more composed. But at length, despairing, he yielded to her unending importunity, and bowing his head, went his way in a daze of misery as black and dense as the relentless, sullen fog.

X

COAST had not taken two-score paces along the path to the shore before the day was again darkened by a sudden and heavy thickening of the mists. That brightening glow, which a little time back he had hailed with hope as promise of early clearing, was in an instant wiped away. So deep became the gloom (to his fancy, as if the fog had been sprayed to saturation with a myriad infinitesimal atoms of ink) that though it was now high morning he found it hard to see the ground beneath his feet.

Then came the deluge. The heavens opened and drenched the earth with a flush of rain literally torrential. In a twinkling soaked to the skin, Coast gasped for breath and bent his head to a downpour which whipped him with a million cruel stinging lashes. He could barely see: through half-shut eyelids he discerned only the rain, which stood out against the purple crepuscle like a forest of thin and shining spears, solid as steel. The fierce impact of descending drops upon the earth deafened with an incessant crepitation resembling the sound of bird-shot falling upon a drum-head. Ever and again this was drowned by a roll and shock of thunder. . . .

Perforce at pause for fear of losing his way, almost beaten thoughtless, lacking any shelter to fly to, he derived forlorn comfort of a sort from the very violence of the squall, which supplied its own assurance that it could not endure long. And briefly this proved itself: heralded by gradual lightening, the heavier clouds passed off; the initial fury exhausted itself. There remained the stubborn fog, deep obscurity, a pelting rain only the less immoderate by comparison with what it had been. Still, he could now see; so, pulling the brim of his hat down over his eyes and thereby precipitating a miniature cascade before his face, he plodded on, shoes squelching, clothing dripping as if new from an immersion in the sea itself.

For some distance the path led him a wandering way; but this he did not resent, any more than he really resented his soaking, which seemed but an inconsiderable annoyance to a mind preoccupied. His being was altogether obsessed and the process of his thoughts clouded by intense solicitude and pity for Katherine—coupled with doubts as to the wisdom of his course.

Was he justified in leaving her, though she begged and commanded him? He felt his understanding harried by the pro and con of the question like a ball in volley between two rackets. How could he leave her so? What else could he do? She re-

jected, discredited, dismissed him definitely, without appeal. She needed him—or somebody to whom she might turn for comfort and protection. Blackstock was not to be trusted: yet she loved him. If, as she protested, she were happy in some strange fashion passing Coast's comprehension, had he any right to step between her and her happiness, whatever the circumstances? If, as was the case, Blackstock had murdered a man in a moment of uncontrollable rage, had Coast any right to leave the woman at the mercy of a temper which might at any moment resume the complexion of homicidal mania? Yet would not his presence there, upon the island, work her more harm than good, were he to be discovered? . . .

He was, in the summing up, conscious of no choice of action: he could but go his ways. She desired it, and though his duty (he saw clearly) was to denounce Blackstock to the nearest authority, secure his arrest and imprisonment . . . he could not. He felt that this was splitting hairs, standing upon a point of punctilio ridiculously fine; that his desperate regret for his declaration of innocence and indictment of Blackstock to his wife was simply a phase of mawkish sentimentality. But he could not help that: so he felt. He was (he told himself in his misery, grown platitudinous) as God had made him: he could guide himself only according to his light.

Thus in wretched communion with his heart, he came almost unawares a second time to the deserted fishing village, was abruptly conscious of shapes of buildings looming through the mists and driving rain on either hand. And with this recognition recurred the memory of the blind dog and the murdered man.

Coast stopped, smitten by cold dread of that scene, unwilling again to view it, and wondering by what detour he might avoid it.

Whipped mercilessly by the rain, the fog had in some measure dissipated; yet, reinforced by the rain, it was still thick enough to veil effectually objects more than a hundred feet distant. Coast could see nothing of the body; he only knew that it occupied the middle of the street, and he surmised it lay before him. Should he pursue his present course he must inevitably rediscover it. Yet, did he step aside, he ran the risk of losing himself again; the only landmarks he knew to lead him to the *Echo* lay ahead. And he was thoroughly chilled, weary and distraught, desiring very earnestly the comfort of a change of clothing and the protection of the boat's cabin. For all that, invincible reluctance clogged his heels.

It was scant consolation that he no longer heard the howling of the dog. Perhaps it had abandoned its dead, perhaps he need no longer fear to meet the



“From his position, Coast could see the prone
body and round it four figures”

blank misery of those uncanny, sightless eyes, perhaps. . . .

Even as he warmed that hope, without warning something more cold and moist than his own flesh touched his hand. He jerked away with an uncontrollable shudder and a smothered exclamation of horror, only to realise that the animal had stolen up behind him and thrust its muzzle into his palm. For an instant his whole being vibrated in sympathy with his unstrung nerves; then resolutely he calmed himself, while the dog cringed and fawned toward him, nosing his knees for sympathy. Despite his fright he had not the heart to repulse it; pity and his innate love of animals outweighed his aversion. He bent over and petted the dripping head, soothing the dog with muttered words for a moment or two. It snuggled close to him, whining, shivering.

"Poor boy!" he said gently. "So now, so, old fellow. . . ." Then, surprised: "Hello!" he exclaimed. "What's this?"

Beneath his hand the dog had stiffened suddenly, and now stood tense and bristling, a deep and angry growl rumbling in its throat.

Simultaneously, from some indeterminate point, he heard the sound of a man's voice, the words indistinguishable, accompanied by a grating noise like that made by metal encountering stone.

"Hello, hello!" he said softly, knitting his brows

as he stared down the roadway, in the direction that he must go, the direction from which the sounds seemed to come.

He could see nothing save vague shadows, formless, dim. . . .

He moved forward cautiously, the dog at his heels now and then growling resonantly. Pausing again he stooped to quiet it. Beneath his touch it grew silent, but rigidly maintained its pose: its frame quivering, the sightless eyes staring implacably ahead.

A monotonous iteration of muffled sounds forced itself upon Coast's attention: a thud, a scraping noise, a soft *plop*; repeated endlessly. He strained his eyes against the veiling mists, seeming to discern a knot of shadows down the road. The sounds continued, to be interrupted presently by high-pitched accents, apparently lifted in expostulation; but the intonation was foreign and the words unintelligible.

Then a voice said roughly: "Shut up and get on, will you? D'you want to keep me standing here all day?"

A grunt responded and the noises recommenced.

Coast gulped; his temples throbbed and there was a feeling of constriction in his throat. The voice had been Blackstock's. Coast now understood what was towards: they were digging a grave for the dead man.

Quite mechanically he turned aside and moved

toward the row of houses on his right; they stood upon the edge of a shelving bank, he found, guessing the beach lay at the foot of this declivity. He descended ten feet or so, and, the dog at heel, skulked along in the rear of the buildings until he came to one which he judged to be about opposite the group of shadows. Then climbing again he entered the structure by its rear doorway—which owned no door.

The place was little more than a shed, evidently a disused store-house for dried fish. In spite of the lapse of years the air inside was still strongly impregnated with the smell; shreds of meat, fragments of skin, bits of bone, all dry and hard and white, littered the planks of the rotting floor: which creaked hideously beneath his most stealthy movement.

Opening on the roadway were two windows, with broken and empty sashes, and a doorway with vacant hinges. Coast approached one of the windows. The dog, blundering helplessly about for a time, at length found the door and stopped astride the sill, sniffing the air, ears pricked forward, body vibrant with the vehemence of its growls.

From a position near the window, Coast could see with passable distinctness the prone body and round it a gathering of four figures.

Blackstock stood some feet from the body, his feet well apart, his heavy shoulders inclined slightly for-

ward, his hands clasped behind him. He was clothed in shining, shapeless black oilskins; the drooping brim of a sou'wester hid all his face save a red patch of cheek. His pose was motionless, intent; not even a finger twitched; you would have said that he was watching the progress of the work, had you not known him to be blind.

Near the dead man, two Chinamen toiled with spades, waist-deep in a trench. Their bodies, clothed in thin, saturated blue jackets, bent and recovered with nearly automatic precision as they delved and cast up the loam. Behind them a little mound of fresh-turned earth grew rapidly.

To one side a third Chinaman stood in an attitude of imperturbable attention, apparently overseeing the job. He was a large man, largely builded: taller than Blackstock by at least three inches, with disproportionately long arms, large hands and feet. In that drearily illusive light he seemed a giant. His face, to Occidental eyes, was a yellow mask, brutally modelled but quite devoid of expression.

Presently he uttered a single word in Chinese, and the labour came to an end. He turned to Blackstock.

"All ready," he said brusquely, in clear English.

Blackstock inclined his head, as if doubtful. "How deep?" he asked.

"Four feet."

Blackstock appeared to reflect briefly. "Six would be better," he said. "However . . . kick him in and get him covered as quick as you can."

"All right," returned the Chinaman stolidly.

He issued instructions to his countrymen in a swift jumble of sharp syllables.

Helping one another, they clambered out of the grave and, grunting, laid hold of the body, the one by the head, the other by the heels. For an instant they swayed it back and forth, as callously as though it had been a sack of flour; then it disappeared into the trench.

The pitiless brutality of the proceeding, together with the sickening thump of the body falling into the trench, affected Coast momentarily with a sort of vertigo, with something closely resembling nausea, and wrung from him an involuntary cry of horror. "Good God!" he said aloud—how loudly he soon realised.

Barely had the words been spoken when Blackstock, as if galvanised, whirled in Coast's direction. "Who's that?" he demanded sharply, his features darkly distorted with apprehension. "Who spoke?"

His fingers tore nervously at the fastening of his oilskin coat; he jerked it open and plunged one hand into a side pocket, as if seeking a weapon.

In surprise the tall Chinaman turned toward him. "Who spoke?" he iterated, as if he had failed to

catch that cry which had unmistakably reached ears that seemed attuned to almost preternatural acuteness. "I heard nothing. . . ."

Quickly his gaze quested past Blackstock, raking their surroundings, and for an instant Coast could have sworn, rested on his face, indefinite blur though it must have seemed viewed through the window at that remove. He fancied that the man's small black eyes narrowed, and he held his breath, fearing he was discovered and wondering whether or not to make a break for it by way of the back door. Then, to his unspeakable relief, the Chinaman's glance travelled on and again paused.

"It must have been the dog," he said, his precise English oddly asserting with his foreign intonation.

For the first time Coast became aware that the animal had left the doorway. A slight shift of position enabled him to discover it standing at pause about halfway between the building and the group round the grave.

"The dog? No!" Blackstock ejaculated nervously. "Dogs don't speak——"

"It must have been the dog," the Chinaman repeated. "It is there——"

"Where?" Blackstock moved uneasily, seeming to sense a menace in the very proximity of the animal. "Keep it away from me, d'you hear? Don't let it come near me. Kick it off—kill the damn' brute if it

comes this way!" His tones flatted strangely, as if he were in truth mortally afraid of the animal.

"It hates me," he said in a mumble—"hates me!"

"Let me have your pistol," the Chinaman put in. "I think it means to attack us. Give me the pistol and I will drive it off."

As if to confirm the wisdom of this suggestion as well as Blackstock's fears, the dog at that instant interjected a sonorous and savage growl—which changed to a sharp yelp as a bit of rock, flung with surprising accuracy by one of the grave-diggers, landed on its sides. Confused and in pain—for the blow must have been a shrewd one—the blind animal swerved, scuttled off, disappeared.

At the same time Coast was aware that some object passed from Blackstock's hand to the Chinaman's. A second later a little tongue of reddish flame licked out from the mouth of a revolver held by the latter, and Coast heard its vicious bark coincident with a smart thud as the bullet lodged in a beam immediately behind him.

It might have been poor marksmanship or fair: the Chinaman might have aimed at the dog; on the other hand . . .

Coast decided to make himself a present of whatever benefit might be held to inhere in the doubt. He gained the rear entrance in a bound, with another found himself charging down the embankment, in

whose treacherous composition of loose sand and gravel he struggled momentarily and vainly for a footing. Then he fell and rolled ingloriously, accompanied by a cloud of dirt, rubbish and small stones. At the bottom of a descent of some thirty feet he picked himself up, unhurt but shaken, just as a second bullet ploughed up the sand two paces to one side.

There was no longer any question as to the identity of the target. Coast permitted himself a single, fleeting, upward glance, caught a cinematographic glimpse of the Chinaman—like some huge, ungainly bird in his loose, flapping garments, descending the bank—and turned and ran headlong. He had neither wits nor weapon with which to oppose a murderous-minded foe armed with a heavy revolver and a very fair idea of how to aim—nothing but the fleetness of his feet to save him. Therefore he ran, like what he was, a hunted thing on unknown ground, in thoughtless desperation.

He had, in younger days, made an ephemeral track record or two, of which he had of course been inordinately vain; but he had never run as he ran now: three hundred yards, and his lungs were pumping like those of a wind-broken horse. With the sound of his pursuer's footsteps in his ears, momentarily he anticipated a repetition of the shots; that they did not come was very probably due to the other's

confidence in his ability to run his man down. For he was gaining—Coast could not doubt that—gaining with every gigantic stride. It was only a question of minutes. . . .

Presently, some distance ahead, the shadowy proportions of the beached catboat took shape through the mist. For some reason Coast hailed it with a sob of hope: Heaven alone knows what manner of hope the sight of it held out to his dazed preceptions. He had merely a bewildered notion that if only he could hold out until he reached the boat it would afford him some sort of shelter—or else that he might stumble across some nondescript weapon of defence—a broken oar—anything. . . .

Somehow he did manage to gain the little vessel, and, with his pursuer pounding on not fifteen feet in the rear, doubled like a rabbit round its stern. He had a fugitive impression, as he passed, of a curious something crouching there; but with no time for recognition, or indeed for thought, he shot on, of a sudden painfully alive to the fact that he had been mistaken, that there was no refuge for him there. . .

Then he pulled up on the sound of a heavy fall behind him—a dull crash followed by a short, stifled cry and a sharp crack as of two stones coming together.

He looked back in time to see the short, starved figure of Appleyard straightening up from the body

of the Chinaman, to see the little man's half-friendly, half-apologetic smile, and to hear him say in a tone of quiet reassurance: "All right, old top. He's down and three times out."

Incredulous and half exhausted, Coast staggered back to the boat.

The Chinaman lay like some monstrous effigy of man, inert, sprawling, with a sagging jaw, shut eyes and a ragged, bleeding wound in the middle of his forehead. A bit of driftwood—part of the water-bleached branch of a small tree—was twisted between his feet; a formidably jagged stone in Appleyard's hand eked out the story of his downfall.

"It wasn't anything," the little man explained with his timid, makeshift smile, noting Coast's expression. "I saw you coming—heard the shots to begin with—and made preparations accordin'. Lucky you chanced this way. Otherwise . . ."

He shrugged and cast away the stone that had served so famously. "We'd better be making tracks before the others come down on us," he suggested calmly.

"You—you've killed him?" Coast panted.

"*Um-m*—no; sorry to say." Appleyard moved to one side and picked up the revolver which had fallen from the Chinaman's hand. "Unfortunately just stunned. . . . Mebbe," he added, brightening momentarily, "it'll turn out concussion of the brain,

but"—he made a dubious mouth—"I'm afraid not. Those brutes are tough as pig-iron. Still, I think I'm some promisin' entry in the David and Goliath class—what? . . . Come along, now: no time to waste."

He dropped the weapon into a pocket, and seizing Coast's arm, began to trot him along the beach in the direction of the *Echo's* dory.

"You see," he commented severely, "what comes of going out alone. Next time I go calling, I want you to stay at home and keep out of mischief. Now, you hear *me!*"

XI

WHILE his crew was whipping the dory's headwarp round a deck-cleats, Coast stood in the cock-pit of the *Echo*, frowning thoughtfully at the blurred loom of land to starboard, whose shadow seemed to fall cold upon his soul with a sinister presage of suffering and disaster. For there was Katherine, there Blackstock, there mystery, terror, death; . . . and there he himself must be, for her sake.

Out of the horror and turmoil of the last half-hour he emerged with conviction and understanding: she must not be left alone in that place of nameless perils. Such doubts as he had previously entertained no longer found footing in his thoughts: it was settled now; he would stay.

In the emotional stress of his unforeseen encounter with the woman temporarily he had forgotten the victim of the bowstring. But now, basing his conclusions on what she had told him of the personnel of the island, he saw without doubt that the man could have been no other than that Mr. Power she had named as Blackstock's assistant. Power was an Irish name: Coast had catalogued the man as of Irish extraction, at sight. . . .

If the motive for the assassination remained dark, that Blackstock was privy to it, if not the prime instigator of the crime, was as patent as daylight. [The man had offended in some manner, had stood in Blackstock's way, had made himself undesirable to his employer in one fashion or another. Thereupon Blackstock's primary instincts had reasserted themselves—among them that blood-thirst which once indulged is thereafter never altogether dormant. Whether he personally had committed this murder or had caused it to be committed (and the bowstring pointed toward the latter theory) was immaterial; it came to the same thing, advertised the identical conclusion, that in Blackstock's company the life of no man or woman was secure.

Coast knew in his heart that he was fated never to leave No Man's Land while the woman he loved remained there with the man he feared, despised and hated.

At once, having arrived at this understanding, he found himself beset by a legion of perplexities, all growing out of the chief of them: How was he to induce a woman who held him in such utter abhorrence, to trust herself to him? . . .

Mr. Appleyard, having made fast the dory, sat himself down, filled and lighted his pipe, and for several moments regarded Coast with a look at once contemplative, penetrating and sympathetic. Then

he chose to divert his employer with an enigmatic observation.

"Silly of you," he remarked coolly.

Coast came out of his abstraction with a start.

"What's that?" he demanded sharply.

"I said: 'Silly of you.'"

"What d'you mean by that?"

"I mean," drawled the little man, "that you're wasting valuable time standing there with your hands idle and trying to make up your mind what's best to be done about it. If we were only a bit better acquainted, or if you had a grain of perspicuity in your make-up, you'd have realised long ago that you'd better leave it all to me."

"What——!" stammered Coast. "What in thunder are you talking about?"

Appleyard removed the pipe from his mouth and waved it comprehensively toward the island. "That," he said, sententious, smiling sweetly up into the amazed face of his companion. "Your predicament," he added. "If you'd only stayed put, I'd have had everything fixed, but of course you *had* to butt in and complicate matters. Not that I'm at all dismayed; I can still arrange everything satisfactorily, I think. But you oughtn't to interfere. If I didn't like you so much I'd be awful' vexed, honest I would!"

Coast sat down and gasped with astonishment and

irrational resentment. "Either you're mad," he said—"raving—or——"

"You lose your first guess," the little man interrupted calmly. "I'm talking sense, and I'll prove it. Listen: you're cudgelling your—*hmm!*—brains for an excuse to go back and establish yourself on No Man's Land—*persona grata* to the inhabitants, temporarily at least. Aren't you?"

Coast's jaw dropped. "How do you know that?" he breathed, thunderstruck.

"I'm the best little guesser you ever met," replied Appleyard complacently. "Take it from me, I'm wise to a lot more than you ever dreamed. Furthermore, I'm for you. Now, with that *entente* clearly established, are you willing to put yourself in my hands and rest easy in my assurance that you'll win out, or do you prefer to blunder on in your infatuated, bull-headed way and take your chances?"

"But—but—who are you? What do you know?"

"I'm the man in the know in this case, all right. But that's not the point. I'll explain, and to your satisfaction, later. For the present, the question is: Will you or won't you trust me?"

Coast made a helpless gesture. "Go on," he said.

"Good enough. Now," continued Appleyard, rising, "the first thing to do is to clear out of this. You get the anchor up and I'll start the machinery."

"But——"

"Tut, tut! Leave it to me; I'm the doctor, and I'm handing you the only possible prescription, based on an exhaustive diagnosis of the symptoms, *et cetera*. And you'd better hump yourself. As things stand," the little man paused to explain with a trace of impatience, seeing that Coast made no move and was on the point of interposing further objections, "we have the advantage of our friends ashore. We know who they are, but they don't know us. But if we stick round here it's only a question of time before we're discovered. Whereas, if we fold our tent and silently beat it, we can return anon (get that 'anon'?), and they'll have less excuse for identifying us with the first rash intruders. Moreover, we shall have had time to study the situation in detail and plan our campaign accordingly. . . . Now will you get that mud-hook up?"

He turned his back to Coast and prepared to uncover the motor, while his putative employer, mystified and talked into a condition of semi-hypnosis, silently rose and clambered forward.

By the time he had weighed in the light anchor and returned to the cockpit, the little engine was throbbing busily and the *Echo* had begun to move, Appleyard at the wheel, imperturbable, steering by the compass on the seat at his side. He nodded satisfaction as Coast began to coil the cable, still

dazed and almost inclined to credit the preposterous situation to a waking dream.

"Good!" said the little man. "Now get below and change—you can't afford to catch your death, standing round in those dripping rags—and relieve me, that I may do the same. Furthermore, I'd be glad of a drop of grog. We'll talk later."

A glance astern showed Coast that the island was already obliterated. With a shrug of resignation he stepped down into the cabin, in good time emerging in dry clothing.

"You'll find a dry flannel shirt and trousers across the trunk," he said, offering Appleyard a tin cup half full of brandy and water. "They'll be too big for you, but——"

"That's no matter." Appleyard tossed off the drink with a sigh of satisfaction. "I don't mind dressin' up like a fool, so long's I get a laugh." He relinquished the wheel. "I'll get breakfast while I'm about it. Better hold her as she stands—no'th by west."

"Do you mind telling me where we're bound?" Coast inquired with mild sarcasm.

"Not at all. This course ought to take us clear of Devil's Bridge," returned the little man helpfully.

With this he hopped below, leaving Coast alone with his wonder, his anxiety, his alternating fits of hope, determination and despair, and his task of

piloting the *Echo* in safety to an occult destination over trackless waters.

Half consciously he felt the likeness of the boat to himself, its way to his. Both, it seemed, moved only at the whim of a blind, impartial, inscrutable destiny, over uncharted seas to an unknown end.

A great despondency assailed him; he struggled feebly, but was overwhelmed. He had a feeling that he should never know sunlight again. . . .

There was not much in the aspect of the day to hearten him. Since the shower a little wind had risen, coming in from the east. The mists moved to its impulse, but sluggishly, in successive strata of density, now tenuous, now more opaque, great grey curtains sweeping over waters no longer lifeless though still leaden and dismal. . . .

In due course Appleyard reappeared with a mug of coffee in one hand, a thick sandwich in the other, satisfaction in his mien.

"Pipe all hands to breakfast," he chirped briskly. "I'll take the wheel. . . . You'll find everything ready in the dining saloon—and don't stint yourself on my account; I've been tucking away a man-size meal while I cooked. . . . How about my disguise? Romantic make-up for Hawkshaw the Detective, what?" He shook himself about in the roomy spaces of Coast's garments until they flapped on his spare framework like rags on a scarecrow in a wind-

swept field. "I feel like the caretaker of a summer hotel in midwinter. Do you *have* to buy all your trousies by the fathom, may I ask?"

In spite of himself Coast laughed.

He was in a more cheerful mood, too, when he returned, the confidence and courage of his manner bearing witness to the restorative power of plenty of hot coffee and bacon and eggs. Appleyard nodded approval from his perch on the wheel-box, where he cut a grotesque figure in his makeshift costume, his claw-like hands manipulating the spokes, his small, blond, bird's head jerking in time to an inaudible rhythm, his pale and washed-out eyes alternately consulting the binnacle and the blind waste ahead.

"A change has come over the spirit of our dream—yes?" he inquired. "Nothing like food on the human stomach to make the skies seem brighter. Not that it seems to affect this weather any: it's thick as curds. We ought to pick up that buoy before long—won't be happy till I get it."

"You're sure about this thing?" asked Coast, perhaps not quite coherently. The other seemed to understand him, none the less.

"Ab-solut-lully," he returned. "I know where we started from and what we're aiming for; this is a perfectly good compass, so long as you keep it from flirting with the coil; and I've made allowance for a lee-tide. You watch!"

Coast sat down. "Well?" he said, with the air of one no longer to be denied.

"Well," said the little man reluctantly, "if you *must* know all. . . ." Coast received an amused glance. "I read the papers."

"What's that got to do——"

"So, when you were kind enough to tell me your real name, after your gallant rescue yesterday morning, I knew at once just who and what you were."

"O!" said Coast, a thought blankly.

"Just so. It never occurred to you that you were a public character, in a way? I noticed that. And your lack of self-consciousness interested me. Also the aroma of mystery you exhale, intrigued (if I may coin the word) my romantic imagination."

Coast flushed. "The deuce it did!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Don't lose your temper—please. I know I sound impertinent, but I don't mean to be so; it's just my temprymt makes me such a cut-up. . . . When I waked up before you did yesterday, I thought it all out, and I sez to myself, sez I: 'His biography ain't half-written yet, and unless I'm mistaken something grievous, Romance is a-leadin' of him by the hand, like a little che-ild. If I can work it, I'm goin' to stick round and see what happens next.' You see, it's my business to go about nosing into other people's."

"I see," said Coast curtly, with a feeling of contempt which he took no trouble to disguise.

"Yes," assented Appleyard serenely. "I make my living that way. Government pays me a handsome salary for doing it."

"What!" A light was beginning to dawn upon Coast.

The little man nodded gravely. "The U. S. Secret Service," he affirmed. "I don't wonder you're surprised. Most folks when they think of a Secret Service man conjure up an image of a burly brute with a bushy moustache, a stony eye and a square jaw—or else a suave and epigrammatic divvle with a club-window air and a dress suit, who spends his time gracefully picking the pockets of foreign diplomats. That's how a shrivelled shrimp like me gets a job; I look tame and talk like a harmless lunatic, and I can go wherever I please without being questioned. . . . Although I'm free to confess I took to sleuthing chiefly because it afforded me a chance to be as fragrant under any other name I happened to take a liking to. Aside from my chiefs there are mighty few men who know my maiden epithet. You little wotted what an honour I conferred upon you by taking you into the ignominious sanctuary of my unsought confidence. As a matter of fact, you caught me between the acts, as it were; else I'd likely have lied. But at the moment you fished me out I

had just sloughed the identity of *George Spelvin* and was wavering between *Mortimer Manchester* and *John Brown*—hadn't time to decide."

He paused, chuckling quietly at Coast's expression, in which amaze and amusement contended with incredulity and a lively interest.

"But—granted you're what you claim and not a harmless lunatic—what do you want of *me*?"

"Just now, your ears. I'm coming to everything you pant to know. Be patient and attend to my monotonous monologue, if you would acquire merit."

In spite of his conceit in phrases, there was an undercurrent of seriousness in Appleyard's manner that earned him a respectful auditor.

"Let's begin at the beginning, for clearer understanding," he continued. "I'm not here for my health—I'm on the job; and things have shaped round so that I want your help temporarily—while you certainly need mine. That's why I'm letting you in by the basement door and speaking in stage whispers. You get me? What I'm telling you is to be kept under your hat."

"Certainly; that's understood."

"Right you are. . . . Now, the particular phase of lawless industry at present engaging my distinguished professional attention is"—he allowed himself the dramatic pause—"smuggling. For some time the Treasury Department has been aware that

a very considerable quantity of highly dutiable goods was finding its way into the country—mainly for the New York markets—without paying toll. A syndicate of Maiden Lane jewellers has been reaping most of the profit, although other goods have been coming through; but that's by the way. Now the Customs net is fine enough to assure us that no such heavy importations could have been sneaked in through any regular port of entry. All we were certain of was that it was getting in duty free—though we couldn't prove even that. . . . So then, I was turned loose on the problem, and I've been puzzling over it for six months."

He was briefly silent, apparently in reminiscent mood. "Early in the game," he resumed, "I had cause to believe that most of the stuff was seeping in through New England. So I sat me down and tried to figure it out from the other side's point of view—supposing I wanted to turn the trick on my own account. See?"

"Clearly. Go on."

"Being a product of this neck o' the woods made it some easier; I know the coast pretty thoroughly. It struck me how all-fired easy it would be to establish a depôt for the reception of goods on one of these little islands hereabouts—or even at some retired point on the mainland. Then one could ship the stuff over by any old unlikely tramp, trans-ship

it to a smaller vessel at some agreed point off the coast, and stow it away for distribution practically at one's own convenience. With such a central station, the stuff could be smuggled to the railroad through any number of small harbours—a trunkful here, a trunkful there, all disguised as passenger baggage; and these waters are so thick with small craft that their comings and goings attract practically no attention. . . . Plausible, feasible—yes?"

"Ingenious, certainly."

"To cut it short, I finally satisfied myself that the schooner employed for the trans-shipment was the fisherman that, as you saw, preferred my room to my company. I took a chance there, like a fool—lucky to get off with a whole skin. But by the time I hit the water I felt pretty sure they had some sure-enough *good* reason for not wanting any strangers hanging round."

"I'd think you justified in assuming that much."

"The worst of it was, that mishap made me a marked man; I'd been a wee mite *too* indiscreet. For a while I thought I'd have to fade into the background and let one of my brother sleuths polish off the job. You can fancy how that would have galled. Fortunately you offered yourself——"

"I like that," Coast commented.

"Anyway, my magnificent imagination offered you to me," Appleyard pursued without loss of counte-

nance. "I began to see how easy it would be to snoop along the coast as your crew—inconspicuous, unsuspected. You seemed to have only the vaguest idea of what you wanted to do, where you wanted to cruise. And I'd begin to suspect myself of failure of the parts of speech if I couldn't insidiously talk you into going where I wanted to—No Man's Land, Muskeget, Tuckernuck, Chappaquiddick, or wherever."

"I'm ready to certify you're qualified to talk the hind legs off the domestic mule," Coast averred with enthusiasm.

"Don't worry; I'm a merciful man. . . . Rather cheap, that—what?"

"Extremely."

"Your fault: you fed it to me. . . . Now if you'll just be kind enough to remember that this isn't a Dolly Dialogue——"

"I don't think you've much reason to complain. However . . ." Coast resignedly composed himself to attention.

"I accept your apology. I'd forgive you a great deal, anyhow, for I'm beginning to think you must be the only original, perfectly-pasteurised mascot. Since we met the very stars have seemed to battle in their course for me. Even the fog helped—shunting us off to No Man's Land."

"Yes——?"

"I had no particular notion of investigating that island first of all; but a number of circumstances made me suspect we were in its neighbourhood. I had figured it out that the variation of the magnetised compass must have carried us sou'west, for one thing; and the absence of fog signals made me think we must have got well south of the main-travelled routes; finally, I knew that, once south of Devil's Bridge, the set of the tide would snake us out toward No Man's Land. So, when we ran aground and I went ashore, leaving you asleep, I wasn't surprised to recognise the place."

"You could—in that fog?"

"I've an excellent memory, and had visited the island a good many times on fishing trips when I was a boy in these parts. That abandoned fishing village made me sure of my ground: in the days when the bluefish ran in these waters there used to be quite a settlement there. . . . However, I'm fortunate in the possession of a sense of locality something above the average, and though it was pitch dark, at first, and thick as mud, I wasn't afraid of losing myself. So I struck out boldly, and by daylight had made a number of interesting discoveries. . . . Hello! . . . Good-morning, Twenty-seven!"

The little man got up and bowed profoundly, as to a valued acquaintance, to a black can buoy con-

spicuously numbered "27," swimming past in a grey wash of seas to starboard.

"Some navigatin', that!" Appleyard observed complacently. "Though I don't mind telling you if you were handling this wheel and I bossing the job, and you shaved that buoy as close as I did, I'd jump you, my son. A few hundred yards to the eastwards, and we'd be swimming, right now."

"Why?"

"'Cause old reliable Number Twenty-seven there marks the outer end of Devil's Bridge. Between it and Gay Head there's a reef of jagged, saw-tooth rocks like the jaw of a shark. That's where the *City of Columbus* went ashore in the 'Eighties."

"Oh!" observed Coast, watching Appleyard shift the spokes until the *Echo* swung upon a course at a salient angle to that which she had been holding.

"And now where?"

Appleyard looked up from the binnacle. "No'th by east," he said abstractedly; then, rousing: "Quick's Hole, an it please you. I venture to recommend the spot. It's quiet, retired, charmingly salubrious: *quite* a cosy corner for a day's loaf."

"Loaf!" exclaimed Coast in exasperation.

"Tut," said the little man in a tone of mild reproof; "and again tut. Eftsoons I will a tale unfold that'll shed a heap of light upon the plot of this

issue of the Half-Dime Library. Know you not that Desmond the Dachshund Detective is on the scent? . . . Le's see: where'd I get off?"

"You were on the point of making some interesting discoveries," Coast prompted patiently.

"To be sure. . . . As I was about to say, I felt my way along, lost it, and presently stumbled onto what seemed a pretty raw slice of melodrama. . . . The first thing I struck for was the farmhouse. Last I heard of the island, it was inhabited by a single family, a farmer, his wife and a couple of kids. Must've been a bit lonesome, but they didn't seem to mind. They do say the man once petitioned the State Legislature to build a school-house on the island to educate his offspring, on the ground that as a taxpayer he was entitled to their schooling at the expense of the Commonwealth. Shrewd customer: as I recall it he nominated himself for the job of janitor and his wife to be school-mistress, both on salary! . . . I had it in mind to pump him, you see, but somehow I missed the farmhouse, the first cast. And when I pulled up to take soundings I heard a curious sort of noise—singular in that locality, at least: one of those noises that, once heard, is never forgotten; as nearly as I can describe it, a sort of rippling crash—very irregular in duration and much muffled by distance and fog. I pricked up my ears and tried to mark down the quarter it came from.

Then I followed it up as best I could. After two or three false turns I fell over what seemed to be a wire stay, groped round and found a mast. The noise had stopped by this time, but I knew what had made it without doubt; that mast was an aerial, and I'd been listening to somebody operating a wireless station. Next thing, I made out a glow of light that led me to a window. By now I was interested and laying very low.

"The window was open—it was warm enough for that—and because of the fog I could stand quite near and see what was taking place inside without being seen. . . . It was a goodish sized room, one of three under a single roof, by all appearances, and stuffed full of apparatus of various kinds. There was a big gas-motor singing away at one end, running a dynamo. Right near the window was a heavy table with all the paraphernalia of a wireless station.

"There was a young man standing right by the table, evidently just out of his chair. He was taking off the telephone headpiece when I first saw him. He looked to be under thirty, and wore red hair and a good coat of sunburn; and he was mad clean through—mad at another man who was standing just inside a doorway leading to another room. That door was closed. The second man was evidently just out of bed; he had a crash bathrobe

belted round him, with his pyjamas showing underneath, and beefy, naked ankles running into bedroom slippers. They were having it hot and heavy, ripping out at each other straight from the shoulder.

"I don't know—didn't hear—what started the row, and it ended just after I came within hearing. The younger chap was saying—he had a bit of a brogue: 'Don't let that trouble you, *Mister* Black. I'll have you know I wired for a relief last night, while you were at dinner, and the minute he sets foot on this damned island, I leave it; nor will I be resting till I've turned in my report at the home office. Put that in your pipe, now.'

"Black (as he called him) seemed to lose control of himself for an instant. He sort of lurched forward, his hands working as if he was going to throw himself at the younger man's throat; then he caught up, thinking better of it, as if he knew the other fellow had grabbed his chair by the back and stood ready to brain him with it; which he couldn't have known, for it turned out he was blind. 'If I had my sight,' he said, 'and could lay hands on you, Power, I'd break every bone in your body.'

"That staked Mr. Power to an ugly laugh—the kind of a laugh that's calculated to make the other chap's blood boil. 'Divvil a doubt of that,' says he; 'but well you know I'd stop at nothing to protect myself against a brute like you, Mr. Black. And

what's more' (I thought he tried to hold his tongue, but couldn't; this last seemed fairly to burst out of him) 'I warn you if ever again I see you lay finger on that unhappy woman, your wife, I'll murder you with the first weapon that comes handy. Remember that.'

"Black was white with rage by this time; I don't think he could have held in much longer. As it happened, just then the door behind him opened, and a woman in a dressing-gown stepped into the room. She was ghastly pale, frightened to death, but otherwise just about the prettiest woman I ever laid eyes on. She said just one word in a pitiful voice—'Douglas'—and touched her husband's arm; but I saw her eyes were praying Power to go. He saw it too.

"'Very well, then,' he said with a little bow to the woman. 'I'll be going now.'

"'And you needn't come back,' said the man he called Black. 'I'll do without you until your successor comes.'

"'That suits me to a T,' says Power. 'Good-morning, Mrs. Black; I'm sorry we woke you up.' And he turned and went out of the side door, passing within three feet of me; I heard him swearing beneath his breath as he plunged off into the fog.

"Black listened to his footsteps, with that weird

expression the deaf and blind have, for some seconds after I had lost the sound of them; then he shook himself and said to the woman in a pretty steady voice, considering how hot he had just been: 'Get back to bed, Kate. I'll stay up the rest of the night. That matter's settled; you needn't worry any more.' I thought his voice sounded not unkind, but it was plain his temper ruled the man.

"His wife hesitated, but seemed afraid to cross him. She said something I didn't catch, and went back, closing the door. Black moved directly over to the table, with as little hesitation as you or I would have shown; it was hard to believe he hadn't the use of his eyes. He sat down, made some adjustments on the wireless switchboard, put on the telephone headpiece and sat there listening for a few minutes, his big fingers playing delicately with the detector. I judged he heard nothing. Then he disconnected the machine, got up and went into the other room—still without taking a false step. The blind are sometimes like that, when they get familiar with their surroundings, you know. . . .

"I was of two minds, whether to follow Power (if I could) or wait and see what next, and while I was debating it, Black returned, pulling on his coat. He'd managed to get into his clothing in a surprisingly short time. He went straight to the door, jerked it open, and slammed out, taking the same

path as Power. I followed, judging my distance at discretion.

"The path led us directly to the farmhouse. Unfortunately I was a bit overcautious, and so permitted Black to get too far ahead. By the time I caught up, something had happened I didn't quite see through, at first. I heard the gate click behind Black, then his footsteps as he pounded across the stoop, and an instant later voices followed by a sound of shuffling, scuffling feet. But when I found him again he was alone—sitting alone in the kitchen, the only lighted room in the house. He had drawn a chair up to the table and sat square to it, his feet solidly on the floor, his hands spread out flat. I could see him quite plainly through the open door. He just sat there, staring at the blank wall opposite (of course, he couldn't see anything, for that matter) and never moved a muscle through what seemed to me an eternity.

"I don't mind telling you the whole proceeding puzzled me more than a little. I had taken up a stand outside, at a safe distance, with the side of an outhouse to dodge behind. And there I waited and watched the man, and there he sat, as motionless as stone. I don't think I shall ever forget that sight, and I've seen some queer ones; it was (I knew later) the most tremendous exhibition of self-control I'd ever witnessed; it was colossal,

stupendous, inhuman; it gives one some idea of the strength of the man. . . . I knew he was listening, and I listened; but there wasn't a sound to be heard—beyond the tiny ticking of the kitchen clock, clearly audible even to me, in that stillness. Not another sound . . . !

"I daresay this lasted over ten minutes: it seemed hours. Then suddenly it came—what we'd both been waiting for—like a thunderclap for unexpectedness, only more awful. I fancied I heard, first, a thin, far shout; at any rate, Black threw back his head, as if he had heard something. The next instant the air seemed to shudder with the most terrible, indescribably harrowing scream of mortal agony . . .

"Then silence again—nothing more. Beyond that preliminary start, Black hadn't moved. He sat on, just as he was, though he understood as well as I, and better, what had happened off there in the darkness: that Power, suspecting Black's intentions, had made a break to get away by boat, but had been overhauled by somebody instructed by Black—overhauled and murdered. . . . And *he* could sit there, unstirring, with that on his conscience . . . !

"After a while I heard something moving in the barnyard and dodged back into hiding—into the shadows. Then a man passed between me and the light, like a ghost, trotting along noiselessly. He

jogged up to the house and into the kitchen: as he entered, Black swung round sharply. This new arrival was a Chinaman—a low-caste coolie, I judged. I couldn't hear what they said—they spoke in undertones—but I managed to catch a word or two, among them 'boat': which fitted in with my suspicions. At once Black got up—heavily, as if very tired—and went through the house and out by the front door; I tagged along, of course. He went directly back to the wireless station, sat down at the operating table, and gave another marvellous exhibition of what a blind man can accomplish, with instinct reinforcing the sense of touch.

“He threw in the motor cut-off switch, to begin with, and the motor started on the spark, just as some automobile engines will. Then he monkeyed with the detector for a while, listening. Nothing doing, apparently—though he may have been getting the range for New York. The next thing, he disconnected the receiving apparatus, threw the current in through the starting-box and primary switch, and began calling the New York office of the Standard Wireless, stopping now and then to listen for their response. Presently that came through, and he told 'em to stand ready to take an important message for Voorhis, the second vice-president: they were to get him on the telephone at once—wake him up and insist on an instant answer. . . . You'll have gath-

ered that I number in the list of my many and varied accomplishments the ability to read Morse by ear; once upon a time I was a regular telegraph operator.

"The message was: 'Power has left without warning, taking boat to row to Vineyard. Absence just discovered. Send trustworthy substitute immediately. When may I expect him? All quiet here; island fogbound.'

"The reply came through within twenty minutes—which was pretty quick work. Of course I couldn't hear it; I only knew it was being received.

"Just as Black gave the O. K. signal and shut off the motor and dynamo, the door opened again, and his wife spoke to him. She said, almost timidly: 'Douglas . . . is anything the matter?' He said in a rough, surly tone: 'Everything's the matter. That ass, Power, has stolen one of the boats and left the island. I've just asked Voorhis to send someone in his place. He says there's a man on the way; it seems Power sent in his resignation yesterday evening.' Those were his words, in effect—as nearly as I can remember them. He added something offensive about that being the finish of that flirtation and that he'd thank her to leave the next operator alone. She said: 'Oh-h!'—as if he'd hit her with a whip. Then he got up and announced that he was going to the farmhouse to get some

breakfast. It was then just getting a little light. He said she needn't hurry, that he would probably be at the beach by the time she came to breakfast—wanted to find out which boat Power had taken. Then he went away, and the woman shut the door again. . . .

“This time I let Black take his road alone; I'd other fish to fry. I could hear his wife moving about in the other part of the building and judged she was dressing; but she took an interminable time to it. . . . In the course of the next century or two, however, she came out, dressed, and took the path to the farmhouse. I let her go, timed myself as close as I could, and dodged into the wireless room. It was taking a chance; I knew that if Black returned my life wouldn't be worth a picayune; but I *had* to know Voorhis's message. . . .

“I started the motor and called New York. When they answered I gave Black's signal and demanded a repetition of the message. That was taking another chance: the operator at the other end might recognise the difference in our styles of sending and refuse me. But he may have been sleepy; at all events he obliged without comment. Voorhis had wirelessly: ‘Power gave notice he was leaving yesterday evening. New man on way, should reach New Bedford this morning, island by evening, conditions favouring. Name, John Handyside. He is

in my confidence.' . . . At least, that was the substance of it. . . .

'You can bet I shut off and skinned out of there in a jiffy; I'd been in a cold sweat all the while. The racket my sending raised had sounded as loud as the Trump of Doom; I couldn't to save my neck understand how Black failed to hear it, even if he were at the other end of the island, and come back and exterminate me. So I beat it on the dead jump.

"The farm-house was in my way, however, and I pulled up there to reconnoitre. There was a sound of voices out front, and I went in the back way—the premises being empty—and snooped to the front windows and eavesdropped. To that instant I'd had never a thought that you might be mixed up in the mess; but I recognised your voice, and overheard just enough to open my eyes to the complexity of the situation.

"I didn't linger long enough to hear much; my position being somewhat delicate—from more than one point of view. So I sneaked out by the rear again, and laid for you on the path to the beach. Then that shower came up and I lost touch with the path. By the time I'd re-found it and traced my way back to the farm-house, you were gone. I set sail in pursuit, but by the time I sighted the deserted village, you were invisible, and Blackstock (by this time I knew his right name) was superintending the

planting of Power. Seeing nothing of you I concluded—and hoped—you'd sloped for the boat, and dodged round after you. Those shots stopped me right by the boat on the beach; I saw you coming and . . . !

"I've talked myself hoarse—for once in my life. Never dreamed I'd have such a taste of Heaven . . . !"

Coast was about to speak when Appleyard stopped him with a lifted hand. "Look," he said, with a wide gesture, "and if you're superstitious at all—that is to say, human—hug comfort to your heart. For my part I'm going to take this for an omen. You may please yourself."

Overborne by the freshening easterly wind, which blew down the Sound as through a funnel, the fog was rolling back like a scroll. As Coast first looked the *Echo* pushed her nose into clear clean air, sniffed eagerly and shouldered bodily out, impatiently shaking from her flanks the last clinging vestiges of vapour. At the same time Appleyard kicked open the hand-hole in the engine-pit hatch and advanced the spark; and the catboat, surging forward at full speed, seemed fairly to leap for joy of deliverance.

In spite of skies grey and dull with a pall of hurrying cloud, and waters dull in sympathy, a sense of life and action quickened and made glad the world. The neutral setting seemed only to enhance the

variegated colouring of the shores. Off the star-board beam the wooded hills of Martha's Vineyard glowed with every hue and tint of the fires of Spring. Over the bows Naushon and Pasque and Nashawena lay, with Quick's Hole opening between the two latter, like reefs of emerald set in silver. Astern the painted bluffs of Gay Head stood out against the curtained background of the receding fog-bank, as if plastered with scrapings from some Titanic palette.

"An omen?" Coast queried in wonder.

"What else?" The little man laughed gently. "Haven't we won out to light and freedom, while back there"—he indicated the looming headland astern that shut off No Man's Land from their vision—"still they walk in darkness, bound upon the wheel of their own naughtiness?"

"Well," conceded Coast a little dubiously. "But on the other hand . . . here's this wind brewing. Doesn't it smell like an easter to you?"

Appleyard sniffed contemptuously. "It do, it sure do," he admitted. "We'll have a bit of a blow by nightfall, certainly."

"And that means trouble, doesn't it?"

"Why?"

"Because I, for one, am going back to No Man's Land to-night. And the more wind, the tougher the job of working back . . ."

Appleyard grimaced his disgust. "Who's

afraid?" he demanded, truculent. "A pessimist," he misquoted with a large if inconclusive air of philosophical contemplation, "is a fellow who has to live with optimists. Not only that, but you make me tired."

XII

WITHIN another hour (and the morning was still young) the *Echo* rode at anchor in Quick's Hole, on the edge of the navigable channel, near the Nashawena shore, about midway of the passage between Vineyard Sound and Buzzard's Bay; and within ten minutes of the time her anchor splashed over her bows, Mr. Appleyard, his plans formulated and communicated to Mr. Coast, was noisily asleep in the cabin—enjoying a rest which Coast, for all his own weariness of body and mind, could not begrudge him.

For six hours the younger man stood a lonely watch, companioned only by the melancholy voice of the bell buoy off the southern entrance, a sound, the most forlorn and dreary known to man, which came fitfully to his ears in the occasional lulling of the wind. Other than this he had only his thoughts. No vessel came his way; now and then lumber schooners westward-bound, deck loads shining like pale gold, dingy canvas spread full to the following wind, slipped quietly past the southern opening—far out upon the Sound. But these were few, and they were all he saw; the promise of the weather was not one to tempt abroad pleasure or other small craft.

What of Buzzard's Bay was visible through the northerly mouth of the Hole was merely a vacant waste of tumbled waters. That most detestable of winds, an easterly storm, known locally as an "easter," was brewing, and only those with imperative business cared to venture from their moorings.

All morning the breeze blew gustily; scurrying squalls, waxing in violence, whipped up a confused and lumpy sea. A little after two in the afternoon, following an especially vicious blast that lashed the waters of the Sound to a yeasty lather, there fell a protracted pause; as if the elements, having tested their power, were satisfied—content to rest against the hour when they should decide to settle down to the stern business of heavy blowing.

Something of this unrest in the air worked insidiously upon Coast and lent its colour to his temper. By turns he sat deep in reverie, considering every aspect of the project proposed by Appleyard and subscribed to by himself, hoping, doubting, seeking sedulously the imperceptible but damning flaw that might transpire to confound them; or rising, paced to and fro in the scant accommodation of the cockpit, fuming with discontent and impatience. At times he saw with hateful clearness the essential madness of their scheme, fairly riddled like a sieve as it was with the element of fortuity, and feared to stir hand or foot to further it; again he fairly tingled

with a wild impatience to be up and doing, a frantic desire for action, movement, events; and all the while must sit tight (as Appleyard had put it) and with folded hands ape the equanimity of that stoic disciple of chance.

A thousand times, if once, his glance raked longingly the northward prospect, and in disappointment returned to rest upon the deserted shores of Pasque, and Nashawena, or to question now the lowering, windy skies, now the streaky tide that swept like a mill-race through the straightened channel. His vigil seemed intolerably protracted: he doubted it would ever end. If only something would happen to put a period to this uncertainty . . . !

As six bells sounded Appleyard hopped on deck, yawning and rubbing his eyes, but with a light in the latter, as soon as he permitted them to be seen, and a springiness in his movements which testified to the refreshing soundness of his slumbers.

"Howdy?" he chirruped. "Nothing alarming turned up, eh?"

"Not a thing," said Coast.

"Good enough. Don't look for 'em till evening. When'd this lull set in?" Coast informed him. "That's all right; fit in with their plans; they'd rather make a landing in the dark, anyway."

"What difference would that make——?"

"Not much; only the fewer boats touching at No

Man's Land, the less attention attracted. I s'pose you know there's a life saving station on Gay Head? Sure; and part of its job is to keep a list of everything that passes by, from a rowboat to a coastwise liner."

"Of course; but—look here, Appleyard." Coast paused, doubt tinting his tone.

"Sir, to you?"

"There's one thing been troubling me. It seems to me we're taking a lot for granted. Of course, to begin with, I was only too keen to believe the worst of Blackstock. But, seriously, what warrant have you for believing he's mixed up with this smuggling game?"

Appleyard rubbed his nose reflectively. "Well," he drawled, grinning, "I haven't got any sure-'nough *good* excuse, I admit. I just know it's so. That's all."

"But——"

"It just stands to reason."

"But why," Coast persisted, "why must it stand to reason?"

"Now, say!" the little man protested with an injured air. "It's a pity I can't allow my intuition any rope at all! I know it's that way, because it naturally has got to be that way. Otherwise where does our plot get off? Seems to me you might be a little liberal; if I were Sherlock Holmes and wore

book covers instead of these foolish rags of yours, you'd stand for the gaudiest flights of imagination—so long as I told you they were the outcome of the exercise of my detective faculty. But just because I'm a common, ordinary ferret, and look the part, and don't put on any dog about it, you feel called upon to jump in with your logical objections and spoil everything. It's a dern' shame, that's what it is! ”

“ But joking aside——”

“ All right! ” Appleyard snapped with a great show of indignation. “ If you've *got* to know. . . . What's Blackstock sticking out there for? Not because he likes it, you can bet; not solely because he's afraid of getting caught—for he settled on No Man's Land before Dundas come through with his confession; not because he wouldn't be safer in some corner of the world across the water——”

“ I told you his wife said——”

“ She said precisely what he told her. Naturally. Probably believes it. Rot! . . . The real reason is the reason why he dropped his remittances to Dundas; because he's broke, and down, and desperate—ready to turn his hand to anything to earn a dishonest dollar. And this job's ideal for his purposes,” Appleyard wound up triumphantly.

“ But,” Coast argued, “ *she* has money.”

“ How do you know? ”

"At least, her aunt had, and it was to go to her."

"But did it? I'll lay you a handsome wager that either she never got it or it wasn't much anyway and Blackstock managed to run through it with the customary facility of scoundrels of his class. . . . Don't talk to me: I tell you, I know a lot of things for certain that I don't know for sure; and this is one of 'em. . . . And now if you'll just kindly quit finding fault with my unimpeachable management of this affair, and duck below and pound your ear for a couple of hours, or until I call you, you'll be in much better shape for what's before you this night."

"I couldn't possibly sleep."

"All right; that's your lookout. But I'll thank you to clear out of this cockpit and leave me room to stretch in. Go and lie down and smoke if you like."

"Very well," Coast agreed, smiling; the little man had actually blustered and brow-beaten him into confidence and good humour. He took one final survey. "You don't think there's any chance they'll go round by Cuttyhunk——?"

"It's one chance in a hundred; we can afford to risk it. They'd hardly be fools enough to risk the run round the Sow and Pigs, a night like this; while Cuttyhunk harbour's hard to get into from the Bay at any time and the channel out to the Sound practically impossible to navigate through with the tide

against you—as it will be for several hours. . . . Get along with you, now, and let me cool off and take thought against the unlikely, on my own account.”

Notwithstanding his conviction that sleep to him would prove an impossibility, with what they contemplated impending, Coast, soothed by the swash of waves and the softly modulated tolling of the distant buoy, presently dozed off; nor did he wake until Appleyard shook his shoulder several hours later.

He started up in some perturbation—with that singular flutter of the heart that men sometimes waken to face a crucial hour.

“Well——?” he asked, half dazed.

“Time,” returned Appleyard coolly. “They’re just about to stand in round Lone Rock. Come on deck.”

His small head and narrow shoulders were momentarily silhouetted against a violet-shaded square of sky that filled the companion opening, then disappeared. Coast, realising from the twilight within and without that the hour was late, followed with expedition.

“What’s o’clock?” he asked as he stepped on deck.

“About seven. Take the wheel.”

Appleyard dropped lightly into the engine-pit as Coast obediently moved to the stern and grasped the

spokes. His first glance was comprehensive, summing up the situation in a single cast; he was now fully awake and very alert.

Adrift and without way the *Echo* was rocking in a chop of darkened water, broadside to the flood current that was bearing her swiftly southwards. Already the Sound was opening out on her port beam, the bell buoy clanging sonorously under her bows. To starboard the channel and the Bay beyond glimmered with a curious semi-phosphorescence in the windy dusk. The islands were dark and formless masses, their contours barely distinguishable. Somewhat beyond the northern mouth of the Hole a shape of white was moving beneath a triangular arrangement of lights—red and green at the base, white at the apex.

With a muffled cough the motor began to throb and drum. The *Echo* gathered way. Coast swung her gently to starboard as Appleyard, throttling the speed to half, climbed out and dropped the hatch.

"Right," the little man approved. "Now hold her steady for Pasque, not too far up channel, and stand ready to put her about when I give the word."

"Aye, aye," said Coast intelligently. He pondered a while as the boat forged sturdily up against the seas. "Suppose," he said abruptly, "this isn't the right boat?"

Appleyard grunted unpleasantly. "It's got to

be," he affirmed with conviction. "What else could it be? . . . You'd make a shine gambler, if you want to know," he added, bustling about busily.

Coast subsided, although he continued to eye the oncoming boat with unmitigated mistrust.

Appleyard, having cast off all but one of the stops securing the gaff to the boom, first lighted and set out the starboard lamp, which was of course invisible to the approaching boat, then lighted and placed the other beneath the seat.

"I got an eye-full of her with the glasses as she came across the bay," he said, pausing beside Coast and balancing himself lightly against the motion of the boat. "She's a stepper all right: a cabin cruiser about thirty-foot over-all with a good, stiff engine in her—twenty-five H.-P., I'd guess. She moves when she moves!"

"That argues a crew of two?" Coast surmised.

"Just about—aside from our friend the passenger, Mr. Handyside—who's in such a sweat to get on his job that he has to risk the passage in the teeth of an easter," said the little man. "You can bet your boots no one else would run the chance—nor he, unless it was on urgent business. . . . Now go about and stand across again, a bit further up the channel," he advised as the *Echo* drew under the shadow of Pasque. "So-o: that's it."

The other vessel was entering the mouth of the

channel, at the moment that Coast put the helm over and brought the *Echo's* green starboard eye into view. A mile or so lay between them. Appleyard lifted the hatch and opened the throttle full, before setting out the port light.

A shower of spray swept over the *Echo's* counter as she bucked the tide.

"That's the stuff," said the little man. "Now they're wondering what particular variety of darn fools we are. Hold her as she stands—steady."

Two throaty blasts from an automatic whistle floated down the wind.

"What'd I tell you?" chuckled Appleyard. "She's slowed down already," he announced, although Coast was unable to discern any change in the speed of the nearing craft. "It hurts to do this." The little man jerked the whistle lever and educed a single, prolonged, derisive blast. "Lord! they must be cussin' a blue streak!"

By this time the *Echo* had worked well up into the channel, the other vessel being about midway through. To a second signal, a solitary blast, Appleyard replied with two, in utter defiance of every rule and regulation for the prevention of collisions at sea. A husky shout of wrath answered this manifestation of landlubberly foolishness. Appleyard responded with three short barks of the whistle, the same signifying what was obviously untrue—that he

had reversed his engine and was running full-speed astern; for at the same moment, in obedience to his low-toned command—"Sta'board, sta'board your helm!"—Coast again put the wheel over and the *Echo* swung smartly on her heel, showing her port light and making as if to cut across the other's bows at a moment when they were but a few lengths apart.

There was an instant of suspense as the boats drew swiftly together. Coast held his breath and prepared to jump should the threatened happen; it seemed certain that the sharp stem of the motor cruiser would crash into the catboat's side. Even Appleyard lost something of his customary aplomb and betrayed the strain upon his nerves.

"Sit tight—sit tight!" he whispered between his closed teeth. "Don't give an inch—they've got to—they don't dare—*ah-h!*"

The last was a sigh of relief as the cruiser swerved sharply in toward Pasque, shot forward a couple of lengths and brought up suddenly with a churning screw—hard and fast aground.

A moment later the *Echo* rounded gracefully to port within two yards of her stern; and simultaneously Appleyard, leaning far out over the combing, made an exceedingly cunning cast with a coil of line which Coast had laid in against the possibility of a broken halyard. The flying loops settled accurately into the water, just above the foam kicked up by the

cruiser's propeller, and in another instant its motor stopped with a strangulated-gasp.

Out of the cloud of profanity that smoked up from the cruiser's cockpit flew first one heavy spanner, then another. Both splashed heavily alongside the *Echo*. Not until they had drawn well out of range did Coast and Appleyard rise from the shelter of the combings.

"So far, splendid," commented Appleyard soberly, staring astern. "I reckon that, between the furrow they ploughed in that shoal and several yards of good hempen rope gumming up the shaft and screw, they'll bide where they are a wee. Till the storm blows over any way. It ought to take a good diver or a marine railway to free that shaft. . . . Now, if you'll give me the wheel, we'll go about and get ready for business. That was child's play, alongside of what's to come. Get the sail up, please."

Coast jumped to the halyards, and in two minutes of sharp work had accomplished the operation—materially aided by the fact that Appleyard had thoughtfully tied in three neat reefs while Coast had been napping. Clewing up the top-lift and securing the peak halyard with an extra hitch, he returned to Appleyard's side, standing ready with the main-sheet. But this time the cruiser had diminished to a light blur against the shadowed shore astern—had, in fact, been all but forgotten by the two.

"Hardly seems worth while," Coast observed, with a glance aloft disparaging the miserly spread of canvas. Close-reefed as it was the sail did seem ridiculously scant and ineffectual—a mere wisp of handkerchief spread on toothpicks—gleaming wan in the gathering dusk.

Appleyard replied with a complacent grunt. "It's a blame fortunate thing there's one man aboard this old hooker that's wise to the winds of these latitudes," he commented. "Wait, jes' wait: by the time we pick up Devil's Bridge buoy again you'll find we're carrying sail a-plenty. Believe me."

For a space thereafter Coast had his hands full; the *Echo* was swinging out of the channel, past the hollow, despondent clanging bell, and the wind had found her with a swoop of fury and a wolfish howl. By the time he had trimmed the main-sheet to his satisfaction and clewed it tight the catboat was sweeping onward at a rate little short of incredible. The shore-line of the Elizabeths faded out of recognition behind them—blended swiftly with the night and the storm. Over the port counter the wind blew fresh and strong, to starboard the boom swung wide at the end of a taut sheet, beneath the stern the propeller was running smoothly at top speed; at the wheel there was a shrewd hand; with these to hearten her the little vessel snuggled her shoulder deep into the water, like a swimmer strong

in his art—or, as Appleyard phrased it, lay down to her work and footed it like a dog with a bone in his teeth. Out of the deepening gloom long and sullen rollers, now and then shaking hoary crests, heaved up alongside and fell astern with a grim sound of gnashing—or else sped the *Echo* with a brisk and forceful slap on the flank. . . . At her heels her tender trailed like a snapping terrier.

Coast considered the turn of affairs with a grave satisfaction touched by appreciation of the risk they were running. Just now all was well, but in time their course must change, and unless he were much in error there would be a sea of sorts running south of Gay Head, an angry sea kicked in by the harried ocean.

“We ought to get this good and plenty—catch it full abeam, on the second leg,” he doubted.

Appleyard assented with a chirp. “It’s going to be some damp passage.”

His companion nodded, went below and returned armoured in oilskins, a spare suit for the little man over his arm. “I’ll take the wheel,” he suggested. “Slip on your wraps, Old Sleuth.”

“Copy cat,” remarked the little man acidly, surrendering his place.

Coast smiled in the darkness. The wind was clean and cold upon his cheek, the wheel was fighting against his grasp.

"I'll stand a lot of impertinence from you to-night," he said. He sighed contentedly. "This . . . makes up for a good deal . . ."

He buckled down with a will to his work, holding the *Echo* to her course with tireless arms.

Steadily the guiding 'longshore lights swung round them, marking their progress: to starboard Cuttyhunk shining steadfast as a low-hung star, to port Gay Head lifting up its lofty beacon, astern, low down, a glimmer, frequently lost—Nobska. No nearer lights were there to bewilder; wise coastwise mariners hugged snug harbours on such a night as that; the *Echo* took her chance alone. . . .

Touching Coast's arm, Appleyard drew his attention to a tiny glint of light in the south, where No Man's Land beckoned them from afar, across a weary waste of broken waters.

Coast nodded, with a set, grave face, knowing that his hour drew nigh.

XIII

ABOUT midway between the eastern and western extremes of the north shore of No Man's Land, a little sandy spit juts out, forming, according to Appleyard, "what you might call a sort of a cove, if you don't care *what* you say." To the west of it lies the only good anchorage near the island—one that can be termed such solely when the winds blow from the south.

Into the poor shelter of this courtesy harbour, under the pilotage of Appleyard (who asserted that he found his way half by guesswork and half by sense of smell) the *Echo* fought her way and as her anchor bit into the bottom and her cable tautened brought up staggering, like a spent runner at the close of a long race.

While the little man lowered and furled the sail and lashed the slatting boom to its crotch, Coast dropped into the tender with a bucket and a bailing pump—taking upon himself the harder task, for the dory had shipped much water on the trip across, to such an extent that toward the end its weight had been a serious drag upon the catboat, whose own self-bailing cockpit, from which the water ran off as

soon as taken aboard, had barely served to offset the handicap.

It was a good ten minutes before he succeeded in ridding the smaller boat of water. In the meantime Appleyard was quite as busy making all things ship-shape and tight against the night. When Coast returned he found the little man getting out the *Echo's* spare anchor and cable, with which he purposed supplementing the heavier outfit at which she now rode; and there followed half an hour of hard work for both of them in the tender before the second anchor was in proper place and the *Echo* fairly secure from the danger of dragging. It was difficult to manœuvre accurately in the darkness, which had grown intense, relieved only by the faint phosphorescence of white-maned waves. The storm had strengthened perceptibly in the lengthening hours, and the cloud-wrack had become so black and deep that not the least ray of light penetrated from above, while not a sound could carry above the raving of the infuriated wind and waves. Only seamanship of a sort not inaptly to be called superb (but not less so than the courage exhibited by both men) eked out by Appleyard's intimate acquaintance with the waters thereabouts, could have brought the *Echo* through in safety.

Coast took ashore with him a new sense of respect and admiration for his companion. What emotions,

if any, Appleyard entertained, remained inscrutable.

Driving the boat through a quartering run of surf, they made an uncomfortable though not dangerous landing on the west side of the sand spit, drew the dory far up and set off, side by side, wet and weary, for the Cold Lairs—as they had christened, by common consent, the abandoned fishing village.

Its row of buildings rose before them, vaguely stencilled against murky skies, atop the first rise, a hundred yards inland. They stumbled up to and through its empty street, a little wondering, a little apprehensive, more than a little alert and inclined to seek the touch of each other's shoulders. They were, in the good old phrase, taking their lives in their hands in this phase of their adventure; and the sense of this clutched at their hearts with fingers of ice. That they would be recognised (save Coast by Katherine) as the men who had been on the island in the fog seemed little likely; so far as they knew neither had been seen but by the Chinaman whom Appleyard had stunned; and it was improbable that he had caught clear sight of either. There remained, however, a hundred masked dangers growing out of Blackstock's certain distrust and misgivings, with a far-fetched possibility that the men stranded on the shoals off Pasque would find some means of escape and communicate with Blackstock by wireless from

the mainland. It was not more than an improbable possibility, but none the less it held its meed of danger, and they might not forget it, though Appleyard had argued and contrived plausibly against mischance.

If the crew of the grounded vessel (he explained) chose to land on Pasque, they would better their condition not at all—merely exchange a comfortable cabin for the questionable freedom of a little, two-by-four island cut off from Naushon and its habitations by the deep, swift currents that scour Robinson's Hole. In another direction, it would profit them as little to seek the cheerless shelter of the life-saving station on Nashawena; it would require more than man-power to free the cruiser from the sticky clutches of the shoal; and their chances of obtaining a tow before the storm abated were positively *nil*.

"You can tie to this," Appleyard had summed up: "they'll stay put till morning. And then a while. That'll give me time to 'tend to their cases proper-like. Even should I fall down there, we've got at the worst reckoning a clear eighteen hours. And if that's not long enough for us to frame up a suitable last act for this thrilling 'draymah of crrime and hooman hearts, we ain't fit even to dope out a scenario for a moving-picture film; and I for one will make up my mind to shake the legit. and try to make a dent in the two-a-day."

From which pronouncement Coast drew what comfort he could. . . .

As they left the howling desolation of the Cold Lairs and began another ascent to higher ground, the situation of the farm-house became revealed to them by a single lighted window in its upper storey. A rather considerable ways beyond this the wireless bungalow watched them with a second yellow eye. All else on the island was shrouded with invisibility, save only those patches of earth and grass disclosed within the radius of a two-foot disk of light, erratic and pale, cast by the small electric hand-lamp which Appleyard carried.

Leaving the beach, they left also the flying spray which for hours had blinded them. The gale buffeting the uplands of the island was still sweet with the fragrance of the sea, but with a difference, bearing not that alone but likewise the smells of earth and damp growing things and of rain. A fine, thin drizzle had set in, scudding low in the wind, coating their salt-caked cheeks softly with an almost imperceptible film of moisture.

They bumped unexpectedly against the fence round the dooryard of the farm-house, felt their way to the gate and entered, moving warily toward the building. Within was neither sound nor movement perceptible: only the windows rattled with the gusty wind, and in the untenanted kitchen a second lamp burned dim.

Most evidently the arrival of Mr. Handyside had been given up as improbable; the servants had gone to bed. One surmised that in that lighted room in the upper storey lay the injured Chinaman. . . .

But it was not here that their interest centred. The rain-dimmed window of the wireless station drew them with an ineluctable fascination.

Appleyard led the way with the dwarf searchlight, trotting lightly, singularly suggesting some new and curious kind of firefly.

The bungalow occupied what was apparently the the brow of the island's highest ridge, something like a quarter of a mile to the south of the farm-house and near the southern shore. As they drew nearer Appleyard slowed down to a cautious walk. At a fair distance from the lighted window both paused, as if seeking some final word; then, without speech (it would have been necessary to shriek to make oneself heard in that exposed spot) Coast caught the little man's hand and gave it a long, friendly pressure. He turned and moved a few paces toward the house. When he looked back Appleyard had melted into the darkness.

He passed a window so misted with moisture that he could have seen little within had he wished or stopped to look. He turned a corner, moved past another window, and came to a door before which he stopped a long minute, not hesitant, but pull-

ing himself together, realising but on the whole not sorry that he now stood alone, had only himself to look to whatever the emergency the next few hours might give rise to. On the other side of those panels were the only two beings in the world who could strike upon his heart-strings every chord in the gamut of the emotions; and he must be prepared to experience them all and show himself unmoved, at least outwardly. . . .

Lifting his hand, he knocked loudly, and without waiting turned the knob and entered. A tearing blast of wind accompanied him, for the door faced the east. He had a brief struggle with it before he got it closed and faced the light—his heart in his mouth, if the truth is to be told.

A hanging lamp of two burners, dependent from a rafter of the low ceiling, revealed the room in soft but strong illumination. Beneath it stood a round, green-topped table strewn with a variety of homely things—books, pipes, ash-trays, a woman's work-basket, a tray with decanter and glasses, and the like. A large rug hid the major part of the floor, the remainder of which shone with a rich, dull lustre, as though well-waxed. There were window seats with cushions and pillows and boxes of plants, a divan, several easy chairs scattered about, book-cases set against walls panelled like the ceiling in dark green and natural wood, conspicuously an ad-

justable drawing-table of the kind used by mechanical draughtsmen. The whole diffused an atmosphere of warmth and light and ordered ease approaching luxury, surprising in that out-of-the-world spot: an effect enhanced, no doubt, by the strong contrast with the storm-racked night of Eblis outside its walls.

To Coast's unspeakable relief he found Blackstock alone. Apparently the man had been sitting by the table, his feet on a near-by stool; but when Coast discovered him he was standing in that dogged, forceful pose of strength and preparedness which seemed somehow peculiarly his: with his feet well apart, his heavy body inclining forward from his hips, his broad shoulders a trifle lifted, his round and heavy head thrusting forward on its thick, strong neck. He wore grey flannels, loose and negligent, and a silk shirt open at the throat. His large and noticeably protruding eyes were turned toward the door, so naturally that at first Coast thought the man must be able to see him; a second glance, however, found in their aspect a strained fixity amounting nearly to a glare, which told eloquently of impaired vision and corrected the primary impression.

Blackstock spoke abruptly the instant Coast succeeded in forcing the door to—abruptly and harshly, but with a certain jerky intonation that betrayed jan-

gled nerves: an involuntary confession most welcome to its hearer; this was, after all, with all its viciousness, a human being—no such nerveless monster of blood and iron as Appleyard had pictured in his narrative of the hour of the assassination, or even as Coast had come to figure the man in his long days of hopeless brooding. It might well be that he could sit unmoved through the suffering of another; but he could be moved and strongly moved by a menace directed against himself—such as now his imagination must conceive by reason of this unpresaged intrusion at a moment when, very likely, he had been calmly considering the enormities of which he was author, perhaps in naïve wonder when if ever retribution would lay him by the heels.

“Who’s that?” he cried. “Who’s there? What the devil——”

He paused to control his agitation. But Coast withheld his reply an appreciable moment. Then, “Mr. Black, I believe?” he said quietly.

“Black!” The man started at sound of an unfamiliar voice, and Coast saw his great frame quiver—slightly, indeed, but perceptibly. “That’s my name,” he continued hoarsely. “But . . . who are you? . . . What d’you mean by coming in here without knocking?” he added with a show of bluster.

“I knocked—several times,” Coast lied steadily.

"The wind, doubtless . . . Sorry I startled you; thought you'd be expecting me."

"Expecting you!" Blackstock moved impatiently. "But, damn it, who *are* you? Can't you give yourself a name?"

"Why, Handyside, of course." Coast's tone was a perfection of polite surprise. "Surely," it seemed to say, "you must 've been looking for me!" Distrusting deliberately artificial inflections, he was at pains to speak crisply, as was not his habit; such being the only way he could think of to disguise his voice. He was watching Blackstock closely, alert for a sign of recognition in the man's expression. Somewhat to his surprise he detected none. "I got orders to come here and relieve Power last night," he continued. "Came down this morning to New Bedford and——"

The words froze upon his lips. A door to his left had opened; Katherine stood there, watching, listening. Apparently she had started to enter without any suspicion that her husband was not talking to one of the servants, and in her astonishment had stopped. The figure of the man by the door could not but be strange to her, masked as its every line and contour was by clumsy and fitless oilskins and the deep shadow cast by the broad turned-down brim of a sou'wester. Yet Coast thought to discern a deathless apprehension in her pose, a mute but in-

finitely pitiful question in her eyes. And his heart stood still, for the crucial instant was imminent; in another minute, two at most, she would know him. And then . . .?

"Well?" Blackstock roused him. "What' you stopping for? I'm listening."

"I beg pardon." Coast tugged at the button on the chin-strap of his sou'wester. "The lady there . . . I didn't know . . ."

Blackstock turned his head impatiently, moving his sightless eyes in the direction of Katherine. "Oh," he said, "my wife——"

The woman moved quickly into the room. "Yes," she said, still with her eyes to the stranger. "It is I, Douglas. I didn't know—I fancied one of the servants . . ."

"This is Mr. Handyside," Blackstock told her sharply, as if irritated by the interruption; "he's to take Power's place——"

Coast removed his sou'wester and came forward a pace, so that the light was strong upon his face. "Yes, ma'am," he said, "I'm the new operator. How d'you do?" He contrived to keep his tone coolly respectful and impersonal, but his eyes were pleading with her, and he hung upon the issue of her response as a condemned man lives in the hope of a reprieve.

She knew him now; his action in discovering his

features had but hastened slightly the confirmation of her most dread premonition. And of a sudden her face was a mask of chalk set with eyes that blazed with cold fires of terror. Coast saw her sway, but though he feared she was about to faint, dared not move to her assistance. Indeed, there was no need; she was fashioned of sterner stuff; though every atom of her being shuddered, she remained mistress of herself. An instant's delay would have been damning; she knew that . . . and her answer fell pat as he ceased to speak.

"Good-evening," she said so admirable her self-command that there was even a hint of languid indifference in her voice. "You have surprised us, Mr. Handyside."

"Lord, yes!" Blackstock broke in. "It's hard to believe. D'you mean to tell me you made the run through this storm?"

The blood was flowing back into Coast's heart. He flashed the woman a look of thanks, but her gaze was blank as it met his, and he knew that as yet she existed and guided her actions automatically. The real awakening to the situation was yet to come—nor with her would it be long delayed. The crisis was not yet past.

"Well," he said, with a careless half-laugh, "I'm here, you see. It is a blow, that's a fact. Had me

frightened; I've seen some storms—but they were from the decks of steamships." He began to unfasten the oilskin coat. "Lucky to get here at all, I guess."

"That's true, or I'm no judge of weather. I wonder you managed to get Finn and Hecksher to take the chance."

"They didn't want to." Coast offered up a fervent prayer of gratitude for the fortuitous turn of the conversation that had supplied him with the names of Mr. Handyside's travelling companions. "But I was told to hustle because Power was leaving you practically without notice, so I insisted. Of course the fog held us up all morning; and then we had to have an accident."

"How's that?" Blackstock sat down heavily, still with his staring eyes turned toward Coast, his face clouded with thoughtfulness. "Where are they, anyway?" he continued without pause, as one reminded of an oversight. "Finn—Hecksher—why aren't they with you?"

"Oh, they're all right," Coast parried, making time for Katherine, whose struggle to retain her poise and comprehend just what it all meant was engaging his attention to such a degree that he had to force himself to give heed to Blackstock. "You don't need to worry about them."

Blackstock leaned forward, scowling intently. "What d'you mean by that? Didn't they bring you here?"

"Only part way; you see, this accident I mentioned——"

"What sort of an accident? Hang it, if they didn't bring you—— Where'd you leave them?"

"Safe enough—high and dry—aground in Quick's Hole."

"The devil you say! How'd Finn come to run the *Corsair* aground? Why, he knows more about this coast——"

"Not his fault. It came about kindness of some amateur asses—beg pardon, Mrs. Black; I'm quoting Mr. Finn—in a catboat. . . . They almost ran us down when we were about midway through the Hole—didn't seem to know what they were doing; and in trying to avoid a collision we piled up on a shoal on the lefthand side of the channel—forget the name of the island it makes off from."

Coast hesitated in assumed perplexity, in actual trepidation more acute than he cared to acknowledge even to himself.

"Pasque, you mean?"

"That's it." But though his story seemed to be credited, the tension held unrelaxed: Katherine was recovering from her shock and . . . What would she do when she had had time to take second

thought? Would her primal impulse to shield him, to further his deception, prevail? Or would some mad concept of duty force her to expose him and bring ruin down upon them both?

He could not keep his eyes from her. Not a detail of her attitude escaped him, not a convulsive movement of her hand (in whose rosy hollow lay his life and hers) . . . She stood unmoving by the table, one hand touching it for support. The other tore continually, but without sound, at the silken ruffles round the neck of her house-gown. There was a twitching in the muscles of her mouth, but the line between her lips was set and hard. He noticed a slight dilation of her nostrils, together with the quickened rise and fall of her bosom. But her deathly pallor most distracted him—that and the cold hard light in her eyes. . . .

Meanwhile he heard himself talking, responding glibly to Blackstock's testy catechism.

"But how the devil'd you get here, then?"

"Pure luck. We'd been stuck about half an hour when a fisherman—fellow name of Wise, from Vineyard Haven—came along, trying to beat the storm home. We hailed him and he luffed up to us—he could do that with his boat, a light-draught Cape Cod cat; and I offered him a ten-spot to bring me on. You see, I understood it was an emergency case. He held back a bit, but the sight of the money fetched

him; and he earned it. I wouldn't take that trip again for a hundred dollars."

"Well, then . . . But what's become of him?"

"Oh, he went back to his boat—said he didn't dare leave her for fear she'd drag and come up on the beach. Besides, he said his wife'd be fretting about him and he wanted to be ready to beat back the first sign of a let up."

"I see." Blackstock nodded slowly. "You must be pretty well used up." He laid his hand as if abstractedly upon the table beside him, moved it to and fro, found the edge of the whisky tray, and grasped the neck of the decanter. "You've earned a drink, Handyside?"

The suggestion was made with an effect of the casual, but two things lent it another significance to Coast's understanding. Unremittingly vigilant, his glance ranging between husband and wife remarked first an unconscious movement of Blackstock's mouth; the lips opened slightly and the man's tongue furtively moistened their corners; so does the heavy drinker frequently betray the strength of his weakness at hint of a drink. And for the first time since she had entered the room Katherine's attention was diverted from Coast; instinctively she turned to her husband; her face was curiously disturbed by a play of emotions almost too rapidly

erased to be intelligible. Yet Coast believed he read them: there was a sort of panic in their number.

"Thank you," he said, "but I'm on the wagon."

Blackstock chuckled. "That's your affair," he said. "I'm not." There was a grain of combative bravado in the latter words. He splashed whisky into a tumbler and diluted it with a little water, finding the objects with an adroitness on a par with that which had excited Appleyard's interest. "Health," he said tersely, and drank.

The woman roused herself. "Perhaps Mr. Handyside will sit down," she suggested in a toneless voice.

Her eyes challenged Coast's. He looked away, unable to endure their pitiful defiance. The drama of her life had needed but this last heart-rending touch. There are tragedies in women's life beside which death itself is trifling.

"No thanks; I'm all wet." He wondered to hear his own voice so steady and in character with his impersonation. "About done up, too. If you don't mind, I'd like to turn in."

"I'll show you the way." Blackstock rose. "You're to have Power's room."

Coast's glance was instant to the woman's face and found it inscrutable. Did she or did she not suspect? . . .

"Power won't mind?" he asked quickly; and still she showed no sign.

"Power!" Blackstock laughed harshly. "No, he won't mind," he replied, ironic. "Power's gone already. We had a little falling-out and he took one of my boats—the only rowboat—and left, without so much's by-your-leave; rowed across to the Vineyard, I guess. In the fog, too—the poor fool. Serve him right if he got carried out to sea and was never heard of again—the hound!"

And still Katherine's expression evinced no indication that she understood.

"You don't seem to like Power much," Coast suggested uneasily.

"Not noticeably. . . . Kate, get me my hat, will you?"

Without replying the woman turned and disappeared through the doorway by which she had entered. Blackstock moved back to the table, and again found the glasses and decanter.

"No, I didn't like the dog," he said, measuring a drink with the same uncanny accuracy, his prominent and sightless eyes seeming to watch the liquor mount in the glass. "He was a surly devil with a devil's temper. One of my servants—Chinese are the only kind we can keep in a place like this—tried to prevent him from taking the boat, and Power turned on him and nearly brained the poor fellow

with a rock. We missed him and after a long search found him insensible down on the beach. He's been out of his head ever since—delirious. You may hear him during the night. Hope he won't keep you awake."

He set down an empty glass.

"It takes a deal to keep me awake when my mind's set on sleep," Coast evaded. "I'm sorry about Power's misbehaving, though."

"Well, profit by his example and don't mix in matters that don't concern you—here, at any rate," said Blackstock insolently. "Kate!"

"Coming." The woman reappeared. "I couldn't find your cane," she said, as she crossed to the man. A gleam of white, a slip of white paper, between the fingers of her left hand caught Coast's attention. He sought her eyes and found them meaningful.

With a word of grudging acknowledgment Blackstock took his hat and stick. "Come along, Handy-side. We won't need a light; light hasn't any meaning to the blind. You knew my sight was gone, didn't you?"

"One would hardly suspect it." Coast took up his sou'wester and followed the man to the door. The rustle of the woman's gown told him that she was near behind him.

"Oh, I find my way about; I know this cheesebox

of an island like the palm of my hand. It's no worse than navigating your own room in the dark."

"Allow me. . . ." Coast turned the knob and opened the door; Blackstock bent his head to the roaring wind and shouldered out against its force.

A hand touched Coast's; the slip of paper passed into his palm. For a single instant he looked into the eyes of the woman he loved—looked and read their message of pleading and despair. Then with a sadly negative shake of his head he followed her husband out into the wind-whipped darkness, pulling the door to behind him.

By contrast, the blackness seemed doubly Stygian. He could not see the hands that pulled at the brim of his sou'wester, jamming it tight down over his ears, were invisible. And when he cast about for Blackstock he saw his figure only when it was outlined against the glow of a window.

Their shoulders touched as they trudged off. The unavoidable contact turned Coast sick with hatred and loathing. Yet he held himself strongly in hand, crumpling fiercely that tiny slip of paper in his palm with a strange sense of confidence, as it were a guerdon of eventual success.

She had not denounced him. He would save her yet. In spite of herself, he would save her. . . .

XIV

"LOOK here, Handyside . . . Voorhis give you any message for me?"

Blackstock stood with his back to the stove in the farm-house kitchen; hands in pockets, his heavy shoulders lifted, he swayed all but imperceptibly on the balls of his feet. In the dull saffron illumination of two common kerosene lamps, he loomed hugely in the room, overshadowing and dwarfing the two mute, placid Chinese who pattered about, preparing a meal—having been routed out of bed for that purpose.

Coast, tilting back in a kitchen chair on the far side of the table from Blackstock, considered quickly and lied deliberately and whole-heartedly, with full knowledge of the consequences of a misstep. Sooner or later the unmasking was bound to come, whether he willed it or no. He was not eager for it yet, but prepared against it at any time. . . . Sooner or later that word would fall from his lips—or from Katherine's—or some untoward happening would precipitate the inevitable—revealing him, an impostor. The hour like the outcome was on the knees of the gods. The sense of fatality was strong upon his soul.

"There wasn't time," he said. "I was off-duty and they rounded me up just in time to catch the midnight train."

"And Voorhis sent no word?" Blackstock demanded incredulously.

"He said you'd be advised by wireless."

"No more than that?"

"Only I'd find this job after my own heart, to do as I was told and mind my own business and see nothing except what you shoved under my nose; it would be worth my while, and he knew he could depend on me. I guess he did, too. I guess he knows what kind of a man you need, Mr. Black, and Mr. Voorhis isn't the sort to pick an operator out of the grab-bag for a special purpose. Isn't that so?"

"If I know Voorhis, it is." Blackstock rocked back and forth on his feet, pursing his full, loose-lipped mouth. "I can tell more about you in the morning," he said; "we'll have a talk and come to an understanding."

"Why not now?"

"Morning will do," said Blackstock decidedly.

Coast refrained from pressing the matter: it wouldn't be polite. It was enough for the time that his story passed unchallenged. The strain was relaxing a little now that he had but one auditor to lie to. It began to seem well nigh feasible, this wild

scheme concocted in concert with Appleyard and put into execution with fear and trembling. He did not delude himself with any fatuous hopes of the stability of his picturesque castle of lies; that it was liable at any moment to come thundering down about his ears he was well aware; he was content that for the present it held any semblance of permanence whatever.

After all, Appleyard had been right. "A brazen front, quick wits and a turn for lying 'll carry you a long ways," the little man had asserted vigorously. "The main thing about lying for keeps—remember— isn't to believe your own lies, but to believe the other fellow believes 'em—same as a muckraker jollies himself. . . . So be aisy and lie like hell, bearing in mind the while that if your whoppers don't go down . . . you've got this."

Coast had accepted the automatic pistol which the detective insisted upon his taking—accepted reluctantly and with grim misgivings; which now, however, no longer troubled him. There was that in the atmosphere of No Man's Land which led him to doubt if he would feel any compunction about making use of the weapon, should matters come to that pass.

For some minutes Blackstock had not spoken. Coast glanced up at him, and as if he were aware of that fact the man shook himself out of what had seemed profound abstraction.

"How about Mr. Handyside's supper, John?" he asked.

"Leady vely soon," replied one of the Chinese meekly.

"Hurry it up, then; he's tired. . . . Guess I'll step upstairs and have a look at Chang," said Blackstock. "That's the fellow Power knocked out, you know," he added superfluously as he left the room, moving lightly with quick steps noiseless in his rubber-soled shoes.

Left alone, Coast fell to the food which one of the Chinamen presently set before him. Although up to that time excitement had numbed him to the fact, he had tasted nothing since mid-day, and was now excessively hungry. The meal, plain but well-cooked, proved a great relief from the somewhat monotonous diet of bacon and eggs to which he had been restricted since the previous morning. He took his time over it, indeed, and toward the conclusion began to wonder what Blackstock found to keep him so long above-stairs.

The dishes were removed and the Chinamen set about washing up, chattering to one another in low, expressionless tones. Still Blackstock did not come down. Coast lighted his pipe. His thoughts reverting to Katherine, in natural course swung back to the slip of paper reposing at the bottom of his pocket.

He looked cautiously round: the servants were intent upon their work, stolidly incurious as to himself, to all appearances; from the upper floor came reiterations of the high-pitched and querulous accents of the wounded man—a sound to which he had become accustomed since Blackstock had left him. He felt, consequently, fairly safe.

Producing the scrap of paper, he stealthily smoothed it out across his knee. It bore a single sentence, scrawled hurriedly and lightly in pencil:

"Neither your life nor mine is safe if you persist."

Very thoughtfully he twisted the paper into a little spill, lighted it over the chimney of one of the lamps, applied the flame to the tobacco in his pipe, then held it while it burned. . . .

Precisely what was one to understand from that message? That Katherine had awakened to the truth regarding the killing of Van Tuyl—or merely that she mistrusted Blackstock's temper, should he by any chance be led to suspect Coast's true identity? That she knew the truth about Power? Or that through some subtle process of feminine intuition she had divined that Blackstock was not wholly hoodwinked by the attempted impersonation of Handy-side, and would, were his doubts confirmed, seek to punish her as well as the impostor for keeping silence?

She had not had time to write more. . . .

The spill burned down until its tiny flame flickered blue and expired within a fraction of an inch of his fingertips. He pinched out the spark, and dropped the unconsumed fragment back into his pocket in a ridiculous extravagance of precaution. As he did so he became conscious of a shadow bulking large in a corner of his field of vision, and he looked up suddenly, startled to discover Blackstock almost at his elbow. With such cat-like lightness and silence the fellow moved!

Coast pushed back his chair from the table, as if to rise, but Blackstock dropped a hand compellingly upon his shoulder, and held it there.

"No," he said; "don't get up; you're tired. I'm off—just stopped to say good-night. Guess you'll find your room comfortable—if Chang doesn't keep you awake with his jabbering."

"How is the patient?" Coast asked lightly, struggling with an impulse to shake off the man's grasp.

"Pretty bad—delirious half the time. Has his lucid intervals, and then goes off his head again. However, he'll probably be better after a night's rest."

"I say, Mr. Black," Coast could not refrain from asking, "how the dickens do you manage to get about with such sureness?" The inquiry was natural; his curiosity was piqued: the thing was not natural.

He tried to bring himself back into character: "I don't mean to be fresh, but you're a wonder."

A curious smile dawned on the face lowering over him—a smile of the features only; nothing remarkable, perhaps, since the eyes were dead. "Habit," said Blackstock; "habit and training assisted by a strong feeling for direction. I guess I'm something like the guy in that book by the man who wrote *Trilby*—d'you remember?—the fellow that could feel the North—turn to it blindfolded? Sort of human compass. . . . Well, that's me. Tell me where I am, and so long as I know the ground, I'll find my way. For instance, I'm going back to the bungalow now—alone. For that matter, I came practically alone; my wife tells me the night's black as a stack of cats."

His hand remained on Coast's shoulder, obnoxious but imperative. "And then," he continued after a slight pause, "my fingers remember anything they've ever felt. Let me run my hands over a man's face once, and I'll pick him out of a dozen any time afterwards. Like this."

Before Coast could object Blackstock had brought both hands into play upon his face; lightly, softly and gently the ten blunt, hard tips of his stubby fingers moved over Coast's features, tapping, pressing, gliding on.

It was all but insufferable; Coast was conscious

that the blood burned in his face like fire, that his heart was pounding—so loud, it seemed, that the other must be aware of it. Revolted, he almost choked at this familiarity of contact which he must needs endure, from the man of all men he had the greatest cause to hate, loathe and despise. He dug his nails into his palms in the effort to enforce submission. Blackstock's face was within two feet of his own; a satiric smile (he fancied) rested upon those crudely modelled, animal features; he realised suddenly that it was the face of a Satyr, simply, naïvely sensual, as soulless as its lightless eyes. And a vinuous breath offended his nostrils; his own breath he held, clenching his teeth. . . .

"Now I know you."

He could think of nothing to say but: "Oh?" It was with difficulty that he succeeded in enunciating that.

The hands moved on, down over his shoulders, smoothly, and felt of his arms.

"Hard!" commented Blackstock. "You've got strength, haven't you? Not as great as mine, though; you'd hardly realise how immensely strong I am. See now!" His hands moved swiftly back to Coast's throat and girdled it as with a collar of iron. "Do you realise I could easily squeeze your breath out of your body. I could!"

Coast's gaze explored the face above him. Its

smile was gone. Something ran cold along his spine, and of a sudden he was without emotion, quite calm and collected.

"But you won't, you know," he said easily; "that is, you wouldn't if you knew my right hand in my pocket was pointing a pistol directly at your heart. . . . Would you?"

Perhaps the fact that he had merely stated the truth was responsible for his coolness. . . . He noted the instinctive movement of the blind eyes, as if they sought to see if it was true; and he thought, *Habit is strong.*

Raising his left hand, he grasped Blackstock's right by the wrist and removed it with a certain firmness. The other hand released him an instant later, and the man stood back with a short laugh.

"But you wouldn't have fired?"

"Not any sooner than you'd have tried to strangle me."

"Of course I'd no such idea——"

"Of course not; but you shouldn't have suggested it. You made me nervous."

For a moment it was as if the mask had been dropped, as if they openly acknowledged one another as implacable enemies. And again Coast remarked that Blackstock quivered as he had when surprised, an hour before; a ripple of tensed muscles, hardly to be detected, seemed to shake him from head to

foot—and was gone in a twinkling, while the hard smile reappeared on the Satyr's features.

"Do you really tote a gun, Handyside?"

"Always," Coast rejoined briefly.

"Why—up here——?"

"You never can tell what's going to happen."

"Perhaps you're right." Blackstock conceded the point graciously. "I don't mind, but you really ought not to take a joke so seriously. However . . . I'm full of sleep and you must be. . . . John—hat, cane." One of the servants brought them instantly. "G'd-night, Handyside."

Blackstock hesitated an instant, then got his bearings and found the back door with unerring accuracy. On the stoop he paused long enough to say: "We'll get together after breakfast and talk business;" and the blackness received him.

Mystified, Coast waited, staring at the spot where he had last seen the man, until one of the Chinamen mildly suggested that his room was ready. He followed the fellow stupidly, preoccupied, his mind ranging far in futile speculation as to the riddle of Blackstock's conduct. Long after he was left alone in the room that had been Power's he sat on the edge of the dingy bed, his gaze fixed upon the reflection of the lamp's flame in the window-panel, —absorbed in the enigma.

He could not rid his mind of the impression that

an inarticulate menace lurked beneath Blackstock's apparently unsuspecting reception of him. He had not questioned Coast's account of himself, he had not seemed to resent the arrival of the *soi-disant* Handyside; but still there had lurked something strange and threatening beneath his superficial bearing—something which, it might be, had broken bounds momentarily when his fingers closed round the throat of his guest. The memory of that incident would not down; and when Coast dwelt upon it he felt as if a trap had opened at his feet and quickly closed, affording him an instantaneous glimpse of depths in which a sea of flames seethed and writhed terribly. . . .

Was insanity the explanation? Was the man in reality a homicidal maniac, at whose intellect the lust to slay ate like a cancer? . . . But in such case, would he have delegated to another the assassination of Power?

Did he or did he not suspect? Did that sudden slip of the mask signify that he had merely allowed himself to appear to be deceived and was but waiting to deliver some telling stroke in retaliation?

Did he believe Coast to be Handyside? Or had he by some unguessable means recognised him for himself? Or did he conceive him to be neither, but some person connected with those, unknown to him, who had been upon the island during the fog?

How much had Coast to apprehend, what to guard against?

To this latter question his every instinct answered in chorus: Everything. He dared leave no stone unturned to safeguard himself—that he might remain able to protect Katherine.

It came to him that it was not unlikely he had been left in that lonely cottage with the three Chinese that they might quietly make away with him while he slept.

With this in mind he took a more detailed inventory of his surroundings; and found them hopelessly exposed. The room was a corner one, on the ground floor, in the front of the house. Its four windows lacked locks or catches, and were so low that an ordinarily active man might easily swing himself in from the ground outside. It had two doors, one opening upon the hall and the other to a room in the back; the latter was locked or bolted on the other side, the former was without a key. Its furnishing was limited to essentials: two common chairs, a wash-stand, a table beneath a mirror against the wall, a narrow iron bedstead in a corner, and a battered trunk—presumably Power's.

Unquestionably he would have been safer in the open; but the storm was now at the top of its fury. Sheets of water were sluicing the house as if cast from some gigantic bucket. The windows rattled

continually in their warped frames; through the interstices draughts played round the room, causing the flame of the lamp to leap and flicker like a guttering candle. A great howling ululated incessantly as the wind tore and raved round corners of the building.

Danger within seemed preferable to misery without. More than that, if Blackstock had planned an attempt upon his life during the night, Coast might as well know it; for he was armed and unafraid, and he who knows what to fear is doubly armed.

Having wedged a chair beneath the knob of each door, he placed the lamp upon the table, turning it low that its scanty store of oil might last out the night, and sat down on the bed, the pillow at his back, Appleyard's pistol ready at his side.

Insensibly as the dead hours lagged marked by no disturbance foreign to the storm, his weariness bore heavily upon him. His thoughts blurred into a chaotic jumble of incoherencies. He nodded, drowsed with chin on breast, roused with a start when some unusually violent squall swooped over the island, drowsed again, and in the end slipped over upon his side and slept the sleep of the exhausted, profound and dreamless. . . .

XV.

COAST awakened with a gasp, jumping to his feet as if to the peremptory summons of a subconscious alarm-clock. Such, in fact, was more or less the case: he who sleeps upon the thought of danger is apt to waken with that thought predominant.

A moment gone everything had been densely dark, with that rich narcotic blackness which characterises the slumbers of the overworked and overwrought. Now in a twinkling he found himself intensely conscious, in the middle of the floor, pistol in hand, every nerve on the *qui vive*, every muscle tense. . . .

Gradually he realised that his nerves must have tricked him, that the hairtrigger of his suspended faculties must have been pulled by some common but unexpected noise. The room was bright with garish daylight; at the doors the chairs were in place, as he had left them; there was not a sound to be heard in the house. Even the wind had fallen measurably, and with it had subsided much of the ceaseless overnight racket of rattling windows and complaining timbers.

He went to a window and looked out. Within his sight nothing moved. A range of rolling land, sparsely cultivated in spots, in others rich with the

brilliant greens and greys and purples of early summer vegetation, fell away in long swales to the grey and restless sea. Fences and stone walls broke it up into irregular divisions. . . .

He received an impression that it was very early, consulted his watch and found the hour to be nearly six. So he had had over five hours of sorely needed sleep. He was properly grateful for that respite, although for the time being he ached in bone and muscle from the strain of his unchosen and uncomfortable position while asleep. His feet felt too large for his shoes, his clothing seemed to exercise an unwonted constraint upon his person, his eyes were heavy and tired and his mouth was as dry and hot as from a night's unwisdom. His whole body craved the healing grace of cold water.

Very stealthily he opened the hall door and looked out. From the silence within doors, there was no one else astir. He went out and back to the kitchen, finding it empty. After some momentary hesitation he returned to his room, found a towel and took it with him out into the open.

There was still a fresh air stirring, brisk and moist but by no means chilly. The earth was steaming slightly and the skies were veiled with a pale grey canopy; mists, indeed, circumscribed the island like walls of a tent, soft, seemingly tenuous, impenetrable to the eye.

Now and again a portion of the island would disappear beneath a low-swung cloud of vapour.

Standing by the dooryard gate, Coast received a fairly comprehensive impression of the geography of the place. Aside from the farm-house and buildings, the bungalow with its skeleton aerial upon the ridge, and on the other hand the fringe of dilapidated buildings near the northern shore, it was practically featureless. There were no trees, only here and there clumps of low bushes—dwarf sumach, elderberry and their ilk. The ground seemed highest in the south—where, in point of fact, subsequent investigation showed that it fell away to the sea, a bluff of a hundred feet or more in height; from this it sloped northward, in slow, gentle undulations, down to the beach beyond the deserted village. He observed moving spots and clumps of grey on the fields to the west of the farm-house, and after a moment's puzzlement, remembered that they were sheep, a legacy from the former agricultural population of the island. Otherwise there was no sign of life; the bungalow itself, with drawn blinds, seemed all asleep.

He went quickly down through the Cold Lairs to the beach. The *Echo* was gone, but this did not surprise him; it had been Appleyard's purpose to heave anchor and get away as soon as the gale showed signs of slackening. Inside the sheltering

spit a sturdy little catboat was dancing crazily at its mooring, but it was evidently deserted, and Coast rightly guessed that the vessel belonged to Blackstock, that its tender was the boat which Power had been accused of stealing—principally, no doubt, to allay the suspicions of Katherine; some means of accounting for the man's disappearance had necessarily to be invented. That boat was, of course, nowhere to be seen; doubtless Blackstock had caused it to be carried up and secreted in one of the abandoned dwellings, or in some recess beneath the bluffs to the west and south.

It was in the shelter of the westerly bluff that Coast stripped and took to the water. Here, as all round the island, the beach shelved boldly, the surf breaking close inshore. Once through its battering barrier he found deep water, where the heavy rollers swept in smoothly. Five minutes of fighting their terrific strength proved quite enough. He watched his chance, allowed himself to be carried back, found footing and regained the beach, narrowly escaping being beaten down by a furious breaker which vented its rage and disappointment in a thunderous roar ere it was sucked back, gnashing its teeth with chagrin.

Scrubbing his flesh aglow, he dressed quickly, tingling with the exhilaration of his recent contest, every trace of fatigue and drowsiness washed clean away. A sense of life and well-being ran like quick-

silver through his veins; he could have sung aloud or whistled but for the sobering thought, never far beneath the surface of his consciousness, of his responsibility. With Katherine to guard and care for, with Blackstock to watch and guard against and circumvent, there could be little room for cheerfulness in his humour. Yet he was glad for one thing, that he felt refreshed and strengthened an hundred-fold, and so the better able to cope with what problems and emergencies the day should develop.

Instead of returning the way he had come, an impulse moved him to scale the bluff, which at this point presented not too steep an acclivity. It proved something of a scramble, none the less, and he arrived at the top very nearly winded. Pausing there for a time to regain his breath, he got a view of No Man's Land from a different angle, for he stood near its western extreme—the toe of the child's bootee. He found, however, very little new or interesting in the natural features of the place. A whorl of wood-smoke rising from the chimney of the farmhouse announced the servants astir and breakfast in course of preparation, but the bungalow still showed a lifeless exterior.

With no demand upon him in his self-appointed rôle of guardian spirit, then, and time to spare before the morning meal would be ready, he strolled along the verge of the bluff with some idle curiosity

as to what the Atlantic side of the island might show him in the way of shore and surf.

At first some sixty feet below him, and as he proceeded at an increasing depth, the beach was serving as a sounding-board upon which the sea beat out its deep, tremendous diapason. In from beneath the trailing skirts of the offshore mists rolled unendingly sullen, leaden volutes, no longer lashed to white rage by a wind that whipped the crests to leeward in blinding sheets of spindrift, encountering the rise of the land and surging up to fall upon it with the regularity and a hundred times the force of a thousand triphammers, with a relentless and dispassionate determination that defied comparison. An unbroken roaring shook the air, beneath which the accustomed ear might detect the greedy sucking of the undertow together with the rasp and rattle of pebbles scoured back and forth upon the rock-strewn shore. And not the air alone but the very island seemed to vibrate with the incessant shocks of that grim, age-long battle. . . .

As he continued along the sole, approaching the heel of what has been likened to a crude sketch of a child's low shoe, Coast remarked the crumbling stone walls of what had apparently once been a rude summer-house and observatory, set atop the highest hillock to seaward. But he had drawn quite near to it before he descried a hem of skirt whipping round

a corner of a half-fallen wall. He quickened his steps and took her suddenly unawares as she stood, half sheltered from the breeze and wholly invisible from the body of the island, her back to the weather-beaten and lichened stones, her gaze levelled to seaward in sombre reverie.

It was as if she had been expecting him; she seemed not at all surprised. But there was no light of welcome in her look, nor any trace of welcome in her greeting as he stopped before her, hat in hand and heart in his throat, with something in his bearing that called to mind a child convicted of transgression and pleading for suspension of judgment.

"I came out here to think," she said—"at least, to try to think. But I hoped that if you saw me you would follow."

"I'm glad," he said; "though I didn't know you were here. It's hardly likely we'll have so good a chance to talk again."

"Yes," she admitted simply. There was a little catch in her voice and he fancied her lips quivered like the lips of a tired child as she looked away from him, seeking again the sight of the sea as if she drew from it some solace, some sorely needed strength against her trials. "We must talk, of course. . . . I have been trying all night to think . . . but everything seems so . . ."

She left the sentence incomplete, raising her hands

to press them against her temples and then dropping them with a gesture of utter weariness.

"Oh," she cried, "*why* did you come back? You promised, you went away, and I—I was sorry for you and prayed you might find happiness, Garrett. You promised, and—you came back—came back like a ghost to haunt me with memories and regrets." Her voice rose to a pitch of wildness. "Sometimes, last night, I thought that surely you must be a ghost—that you had been executed, killed and buried, and were come back to be his punishment—and mine, and mine!"

"His punishment—*his?*" he echoed. "Then, Katherine, then you do believe——!"

"Ah, how do I know? What do I believe—what can I believe? I don't know. I can't think right: it's all so—so terrible." Her tone fell to a low pitch of fatigue, dejection and bewilderment. She leaned heavily against the wall, watching the sullen, interminable succession of the surges. "You sowed doubt in my mind and fear in my heart when you bade me weigh what I once knew of the good in you against what I have learned of him. I tried——so hard!——to do so justly and still believe you the guilty one . . . You swept the ground from under me with your arguments, your attitude, your explanations; and though they were your unsupported words . . . I never knew you to lie to me, Garrett,

and I couldn't, can't believe you would bring me a lie to torture me, just for revenge. . . . You made me think, and—at times I feared I should go mad, and then again I was afraid I wouldn't . . .” She turned suddenly to him and grasped his arms, lifting frantic, piteous eyes to his. “Oh, Garrett, Garrett!” she pleaded, half hysterical, “tell me you lied, tell me it isn't true, tell me it was you——!”

He shook his head sorrowfully, and with a short dry sob she released him and fell back against the wall, shaken and trembling.

“If,” he said slowly—“if I thought it would make you happy, if I believed that good of any sort could come of it to you, Katherine, if I could even think it safe, I would lie—I'd lie with a clear conscience and tell you it was I who killed Van Tuyl. I've taken time to think it over and I've tried to think straight, to think the way that would be best for you, and . . . Well, I've come back.”

She said nothing and kept her eyes averted for a little time while her hands tore nervously at her handkerchief. He stared dumbly with hungry eyes and a hungry heart at the picture she made, her fair beauty in relief against the grey and moss-green of the stones. The wind played in and touselled her beautiful hair, whipped a strand of it like pure gold across her forehead, brushed colour upon the pallor of her cheeks. . . .

"But why?" she repeated abruptly. "Why? What good can you do? Can you lift this weight from my heart, can you right the wrong to yourself, by being here? Can you bring Van Tuyl to life or make my—the man I married less than a murderer——?"

"I came to protect you; you were alone and friendless."

"He would not harm me," she said in an uncertain voice.

"Do you believe that? Do you expect me to believe it when I have seen the marks of his brutality upon your arm?"

"He didn't mean it, Garrett. He has his temper and—and sometimes he forgets and doesn't realise his strength—but he would never do worse. If it's true—and O, I know it must be!—that he did—what you were accused of—it has been a lesson to him. I'm sure it has. He——"

Garrett shook his head. "Then what made you write that message last night?" he asked.

"What do you mean? . . . O, I don't know. I was afraid . . ."

"And I was afraid," he said gravely, "and still am. That's why I couldn't stay away. The only man you could turn to in case of need was gone . . ."

"Mr. Power?" She flashed him a startled look.

"How did you know that yesterday? And how did you find out another man was to take his place—his name, and everything? So that you dared come here in his stead . . .!"

"I found it out before I left the island yesterday morning," he said slowly, wondering how much he dared tell her.

It seemed needlessly cruel to shock her with the story of the murder on the island at that time; some hours must surely elapse before Appleyard could return; indeed, Coast did not expect him till the evening. And until then matters must stand as they were; nothing must be allowed to happen to rouse Blackstock's suspicions. But if she knew that Power had been assassinated—could existing conditions continue to obtain? Would she be able to continue to bear herself toward Blackstock as she had theretofore?

He decided to keep her in the dark as long as possible. He continued: "There were two of us ashore, you know—my companion as well as myself. It seems he stumbled upon the bungalow in the fog and accidentally overheard a part of Power's final quarrel with—with Blackstock. Then he—learned"—Coast slurred the explanation, but she forgot to question it—"that a man named Handyside was to replace Power. So we thought it over and decided I was to be Handyside."

She was facing him squarely now, eyes wide with interest and alarm. "But—but how can you? What do you know about the work? The minute he" (she could no longer name Blackstock intimately, it seemed) "asks you to send or take a message——"

"I will cheerfully comply, if required," he assured her. "You see, I know enough about the system to make a stagger at operating. You forget my experience with the Signal Corps in the Spanish War—that taught me Morse; and it also interested me enough in such things to make me spend a good deal of time in the wireless room every time I crossed the water. I couldn't help picking up a working knowledge of the system under such circumstances. Don't worry; I'll make good when the call comes."

"But this Mr. Handyside—he may arrive at any time now; and then——"

"I doubt if he ever sees the island," Coast interrupted, smiling. "You see, the *Corsair* did run aground in Quick's Hole: *we* were the amateur asses that got in her way. And we left her there. Now Appleyard—that's my companion—has gone back to see that Messrs. Finn and Hecksher and Handyside do nothing rash."

"He can prevent them?" A pucker of perplexity gathered between her brows. "How?"

"He'll manage somehow; he's very clever, Apple-yard is——"

"But he must have some sort of plan," she countered quickly; "and you would know it. You're keeping something back. What is it? What does it mean?"

"I'll tell you in a moment," he temporised. "But first I'll ask some questions."

Still puzzled, she held his eyes intently. "I can't imagine what you mean. But go on."

"You told me that he—Blackstock settled here to work on his inventions. Do you think he has accomplished much, that way, since you came to the island?"

She shook her head slowly. "Not a great deal. His eyes have hampered progress, of course."

"I thought as much. . . . And do I understand that no one ever visits the island except your weekly boat from New Bedford?"

"No one. . . . That is, sometimes, fishermen——"

"For what purpose?"

"I don't know; there was once quite a settlement of them down there, you know; and I understand they still use some of the buildings to store dried fish in. I'm afraid that never interested me much."

"You never watched them——?"

"No; generally they come to anchor after night-

fall and are gone before daylight the next morning. Sometimes he has gone down to the beach to talk to them, but as a rule Mr. Power went with him."

"Their visits are fairly regular?"

"I think so; the schooner comes about once a month, I should say. But——"

"And between whiles smaller boats call?"

"Now and then, yes."

"Do you recall when the schooner was here last?"

"About a month ago, I think. But, Garrett——"

"Just a minute, and then I'll explain what I'm driving at. . . . Now isn't it a fact that Blackstock and Power were busiest with the wireless as a rule for a few days before the schooner showed up?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "I never connected the two; but it was so. How did you know?"

"I merely guess. Now I'm going to guess again, in another direction. . . . You didn't inherit much from your aunt, did you?"

"Why . . . a few keepsakes only. You see, she disapproved of my engagement to Mr. Blackstock, Garrett, and when I—was stubborn, she changed her will, just a little while before she died. She left everything in trust to me, but I was to receive nothing until I divorced my husband, or he died. The house is mine, but not to rent or sell, nor may I live in it except alone or with a woman companion only."

"I thought—something of the sort. . . . Your private fortune wasn't large, was it?"

"Not large—between sixty and seventy thousand dollars."

"And you let Blackstock take care of it?"

"Of course. He was my husband, I loved and trusted him—then." The last word fell with a bitter accent.

"And while abroad—he gambled pretty extensively?"

"I'm afraid so. After he had consulted specialists in Berlin, we spent some time at Monte Carlo and later at Ostend and Trouville. Douglas—went frequently to the casino with friends. He spoke once or twice of winning, but——"

"But never of losing?"

She shook her head. "But what has all this to do——?"

"Don't you see, Katherine? . . . The man pretended to be well to do: in fact he had nothing. He married you for your money and what you were to inherit. Disappointed in the latter, he took the former and gambled it away. That's why you're here, why he's making this desperate attempt to recoup. Appleyard guessed it down to the last detail!"

Bewilderment clouded her eyes. "But, Garrett, I'm afraid I don't understand. What 'desperate

attempt to recoup'? Who is this Mr. Appleyard, and why should he concern himself with my affairs?"

"I'll tell you." In few phrases Coast sketched succinctly Appleyard, his connection with the Secret Service Bureau, his theory as to the smuggling conspiracy and the part Blackstock played therein, together with the selection of No Man's Land as a strategic base and distributing depôt.

The woman attended with growing interest and excitement, for the time forgetful even of the more vital crisis, nodding affirmation to a point well-taken, frowning slightly over surmises which seemed to her far-fetched, but on the whole endorsing his conclusions.

"The thing's plain as a map," he wound up in a glow of triumphant reasoning, himself momentarily unmindful of their greater and more intimate trouble. "Appleyard was right in every guess he made. . . . The location of the island is ideal for the purpose, just far enough north of the main-travelled lane to be convenient; the steamer has only to swing a few points off her normal course to find herself in lonely waters, where she can make a transshipment without detection or noticeable loss of time. The wireless station is essential, enabling Blackstock to pick up the steamer on her approach and pass on the news to the schooner, which sets out, meets the steamer, takes off its consignment of dutiable goods,

returns to No Man's Land under cover of darkness the better to dodge the lookout on Gay Head, and leaves before morning to continue her innocent fishing trip. Other boats, small boats, call by night and remove the goods piecemeal, landing them at this small harbour or that—just as Appleyard figured it out. . . . And so we have them.”

“You have them?” the woman repeated, perplexed.

“It's a practical certainty the schooner left New Bedford night before last; we saw her go, unless Appleyard is greatly mistaken. . . . And hasn't there been an unusual amount of wireless signalling going on the past day or so?”

“That is so. The day of the fog either Douglas or Mr. Power was constantly in the operating room. I remember now that as the fog continued Douglas seemed to grow more and more irritable . . .”

“Because it was keeping the vessels from finding one another. Since then there has been the storm to blow the schooner off-shore. Most probably she will try to make a landing to-night.”

The woman moved a little away, as if suddenly sobered and brought back to realisation of her position; again her eyes sought counsel and consolation of the sea.

“And since then—he has been busy?” Coast pursued, heedless.

"Yes—and more irritable. That night he had been drinking more than usual; I attributed his bad temper to that. Almost all that evening he spent with Mr. Power, in the wireless room, the door closed. . . . It was stupid of me, but I attached no especial importance to it. Now and then their voices sounded excited, but it wasn't anything unusual for them to quarrel, especially when Douglas was—drinking. I interrupted once, and Douglas caught my arm and put me out of the room. It was then he hurt me—as you saw. After that they quarrelled more fiercely than ever—I think partly on account of the way Douglas had treated me. Mr. Power seemed to resent Douglas's roughness toward me. . . ."

"It wasn't an uncommon occurrence, then?" The rage smouldering in Coast's heart thickened his utterance.

She noticed and understood, and turned back to him quickly, offering her hand, her eyes beseeching. "Don't, Garrett," she said brokenly; "don't think about that. It is over now—now that I know. I couldn't bear ever to have him touch me again." She struggled a moment against a rising tide of emotion, while he held her hand imprisoned in his own. There was despair in the face upturned to his that wrung his heart, so that he feared to trust himself to speak. "But, O Garrett, Garrett!" she cried

forlornly. "What is to become of me? What am I to do——?"

He drew her to him. "Why," he said tenderly, "that is why I am here, Katherine—to watch over and take care of you, to see that no harm comes to you. That is why I insisted on returning before Appleyard went farther with his plans. I should have gone mad with the thought of you here, alone, defenceless, last night. . . . If you will only trust me . . ."

His arm closed round her and for a moment she was very close to him, her head upon his bosom, her slender body racked and torn with sobs. He held her so, compassionate and pitiful, striving as best he might to soothe her—the while joy sang in his soul.

"Only trust me," he murmured—"trust me a little, Katherine; and all shall yet be well. . . . It is not the end, my dear, but just a beginning. . . . Have faith a little . . ."

Gradually her transports stilled. "I do trust you, Garrett." Tears gemmed her eyes like stars. "I do and shall . . . but, O be kind to me, for if I have been foolish and headstrong and—mad, I am paying for it, paying heavily for it. It's all so dark and hopeless, Garrett—I see no light . . ."

"Yet there is light," he said; and again confidently: "The light is there."

"I know . . . I know."

She drew away and dried her eyes. "I must go," she said in a steady voice, "before he wakes. He was up late last night and I'm afraid drank a great deal. I left him sleeping heavily."

"The servants can't see you return to the bungalow from this direction, can they?"

"No . . ."

"I'll make a detour. We must be careful for a little while. Can you bear up, do you think?"

"A little while——?" She smiled forlornly.

"Appleyard will be back with the *Echo* by night."

"I will try, Garrett, and I don't think I'll fail. I've something left to cling to." She hesitated an instant, looking up to him with her wistful smile. "I think," she said slowly—"I think I see, far off but clear, Garrett, just a glimmer of the light."

XVI

TAKING a roundabout course eastward, which practically completed the circuit of the island, Coast tramped back to a lonely breakfast in the farmhouse.

He had anticipated, and not without a certain amount of dread, for the situation between them could not but be strained, the morning meal in company with Blackstock and Katherine—principally because nothing had been said to lead him to expect anything otherwise. It was with relief, then, that he saw one of the coolies set out for the bungalow with a napkin covered tray and a luncheon basket.

The other servant (he never learned to distinguish one from the other; both answered to the name of John) waited on him in silence. Both, he noticed, confined their communications to monosyllables wherever possible; their demeanour with respect to him was neither surly nor over civil—merely indifferent. He weighed them inquisitively for a while, then gauged them as a low-calibre of intelligence, commonplace specimens of their type deriving their initiative solely from the man called Chang (who

remained invisible) and forthwith relegated them to a limbo of insignificance. That they would spy upon him, or knife him from behind with the same insouciance, if set the task, he did not doubt; but they were morally and physically incapable of any overt act of offence, such as he had to fear from Blackstock or possibly from the redoubtable Chang.

During the remainder of the morning he saw nothing more of Katherine. Without giving the matter really definite thought he had assumed that Blackstock would send for him when he was wanted. Nothing of the sort happened, although he could not doubt that Blackstock was up and about; about mid-morning both coolies went to the bungalow to set it to rights; and intermittently throughout the slow, dull hours he heard the drum of the wireless spark, its whip-lash crackling from a distance resembling a smart fusillade of pistol shots.

The sound filled him with apprehensions. It was quite possible that Blackstock would think to settle any doubts he might entertain about the identity of his new aide by questioning Voorhis via wireless. In such event the tissue of falsehood upon which he had bolstered up his position on the island would almost certainly be exposed. And then . . .?

But however disturbing it might be to contemplate, the possibility of such a contretemps was not a stranger to Coast's calculations; he was prepared to

face it. Should the wind veer in that quarter, he would simply have to fight. Only . . . He would have given much to know positively.

To ease the irk of idle waiting, he set himself to explore the Cold Lairs. Though now he examined the village in the cold light of day, it revealed little of moment. The buildings proved few in number—a mere handful, in fact; of them he discovered three in excellent repair, stout and weather-proof. These were all securely locked and shuttered; a bit of information that merely lent additional confirmation to the soundness of Appleyard's theory—if, indeed, any more were now needful to support Coast's personal convictions. That they were the storehouses of the distributing depôt seemed unquestionable.

He spent a long time in unavailing search for the rowboat alleged to have been stolen by Power, at length concluding that if it were anywhere in the settlement it must be under lock in one of the storehouses.

But for the blind collie the location of Power's unmarked grave might easily have escaped notice; there was no sign of recently turned earth in the village street, the rain having obliterated every trace of digging. As Coast entered those desolate precincts he caught sight of the animal stretched at length upon the ground at about the

place he would have guessed Power had been buried. At the sound of his footsteps it rose, growling and bristling, but when he spoke it seemed to recognise his voice and suffered him to pat its head, showing a subdued and dejected gratitude; and when he moved on, followed at his heels for a while, but presently deserted him to nose back to its place of mourning.

Touched by this exhibition of devotion, Coast presently returned to the animal, endeavouring by kindly words and treatment to console it; but its grief was yet too recent and too poignant to yield to human sympathy. Beyond an occasional thump of its bedraggled tail, or a low, heartbroken whine, he received no response: still the brown and tan muzzle remained at rest between the outstretched paws, and as always the glassy, opaque and colourless eyeballs told nothing. . . .

At length discouraged, he left it so and wandered down to the beach, where the catboat, bobbing at its mooring, provided him with an excuse for some minutes of idle dreaming. In his fancy it represented a possible means of escape for Katherine and himself, should worst come to worst . . . if only he were able to lay hands on its tender in the moment of emergency! Not only was that lacking, however, but any way of reaching it whatever—save by swimming; and he questioned Katherine's ability to swim

that far, if, indeed, she were able to swim at all. Furthermore, he could not be sure the boat was seaworthy; to his eye it rode deep and sluggishly, as if half full of water; while its sail might prove to be no more than a tattered rag, its halyards rotten . . .

Lifting and falling upon the rolling, leaden waters, the little boat seemed to courtesy mockingly when it was not turning to him the shoulder of disdain.

He moved on disconsolately, wondering, pondering, planning eternally against the machinations of the unforeseeable—than which, he felt in his heart, nothing could be more certain . . . on No Man's Land. . . .

Some time after noon one of the coolies found him strolling aimlessly along the beach and called him to luncheon.

Again in the farm-house kitchen, attended by the two unresponsive Chinese, he ate listlessly, his gaze fixed upon the elevation of the bungalow visible through the open window. He saw no sign of Katherine, nothing of Blackstock; the due departure of one John with tray and hamper was the only indication that the place was still inhabited.

He stopped the servant and entrusted him with a message to Blackstock, inquiring whether or not his services were desired. Even though his first attempt to discharge the duties of wireless operator

were to result in his unmasking, he could not much longer hold himself in rein: anything were preferable to this agonising incertitude.

While the man was away he received something of a shock. Noiseless in thick-soled felt slippers, the man Chang came down to the kitchen, his great gaunt frame dwarfing not only all it contained but the room itself. He said nothing, responding to Coast's brief diplomatic nod by nothing more than a steady enigmatic stare. The American could see no signs of bodily infirmity in the fellow's actions; he moved with decision and an air of sullen dignity; but there was a hint of pallor beneath his ochre-tinted skin, and the bandage round his head just above the eyes bore witness to the shrewdness with which Appleyard had smitten.

Seating himself adjacent to the door, he fixed his heavy-lidded eyes on Coast, narrowing them until the pupils gleamed like embers between the slits, and so maintained his gaze, steady and unswerving—his face with its high cheek-bones and heavy lips wholly naked of expression if as hideous as one of the masks his countrymen fashion for sale to the foreign devils. . . .

The answer came back from the bungalow: Mr. Black would send for Mr. Handyside when he needed him.

As soon as he could without loss of face, Coast

escaped Chang's glare and took himself again to the open.

Late in the afternoon he found himself dawdling in the neighbourhood of the bungalow, drawn thither irresistibly, the dictates of prudence and discretion to the contrary of no avail to hold him back. The suspense had become rather more than flesh could endure. He felt that he would presently do something desperate if he did not learn how it was with her, how her day was going. A thousand fears for her were driving him to distraction. . . .

With the slow, monotonous ageing of the day the wind had fallen still more markedly; it now stirred with an effect of weariness, as if tired out by its efforts to stir an atmosphere heavy-laden with humidity to the point of saturation. Over land and sea mists were stealing softly, like jaded wraiths drooping with exhaustion as they wended back from the weird revels of last night's Witches' Sabbath. The sea itself was subsiding into long, sad swells, the sound of whose incessant breaking upon the fore-shore filled the air with a deep and solemn note, endlessly iterated, resembling a low, dull growl of melancholy impotence. In the sonorous stillness slight noises owned strange echoes and the illusion of alarms: the querulous cry of the questing gull rang out over the island like a call for help in extremity, the voices of the servants in the farm-house

carried clearly to a well-nigh incredible distance, the occasional staccato snapping of the wireless spark rattled over the uplands like the brisk, broken detonating of a pack of firecrackers. . . .

Coast approached the bungalow from the north—the direction opposite the end in which the wireless station was installed. As he rounded the corner, with purpose to go directly to Blackstock, he passed out of observation from the farm-house and simultaneously caught sight of Katherine through one of the living-room windows.

She was standing on the threshold of the operating room, evidently about to leave it; one hand rested on the knob of the door, ready to draw it to. Her face was turned away as she looked back into the further room, so that Coast saw only her profile. Clad in its customary costume—the short tweed skirt, trim high laced boots and heavy linen blouse—her slender figure was poised with an effect of graceful vigour and youthful elasticity; it required the sharpened solicitude of the man who loved her to penetrate beyond that first visual impression and divine that she was tense and rigid with emotion and nervous strain. He read in her attitude something of alarm, surprise, consternation and assumed submissiveness; and understood that a crisis was passing. . . .

Moving silently to the main entrance, he waited

there where she could not but see him when she turned back into the room.

From beyond her came the rumble of her husband's voice. He was speaking quickly and with force, but Coast could not hear what he said.

The woman waited, moveless, until his voice dropped. Then she said quietly, in an ordinary tone: "Is that all?" To which apparently he assented. She added: "Very well. I'll be ready."

She shut the door and saw Coast.

In an instant her face was bloodless; only her gaze leapt to his eyes like a levelled flame. Her hands moved suddenly toward her bosom, hesitated half-way, and fell slowly, fluttering. She sighed profoundly. . . . Then abruptly, as she recognised that he was frightened for her and in another moment would hurry to her side, heedless of consequence, she resumed command of herself with an astonishing effort of will; the small hands tightened at her sides, she lifted her head, closed her lips tight, and stood momentarily at attention, listening to some noise beyond the door.

The silent moment ended in the crashing of the wireless. At the first report, as if released from a spell, the woman moved quickly over to the door. Her hand closed imperatively round Coast's forearm.

From colourless lips her voice came low but clear.

"Listen, Garrett—don't interrupt. . . . Something has happened; we are to leave the island to-night! . . . Hush—don't speak; his hearing is abnormally sharp; when he stops sending . . . He has just told me. A boat will come for us. He didn't say when—after dinner, sometime, I gathered. He has just told me to pack up a few necessities. . . ."

The noise of the wireless ceased, and she stopped speaking in the same breath. Immediately, in the hush, they heard the hiss of the switch thrown out to divert the current from the sending apparatus to the detector.

"He's fishing for the answer, now," Coast ventured in a guarded tone.

"Hush!" she told him sharply, whispering. "Wait! . . ."

She inclined her head, sedulously on guard, and for a while seemed to hold her breath. The hand upon his arm was trembling violently; he put his own palm over it with a strong and reassuring pressure.

"Steady dear!" he murmured. "Don't be afraid. . . ."

She shook her head with a futile effort to smile bravely. "Only be quiet . . ." she begged.

A minute passed, and another, and yet another the pause filled with the dull drone of the dynamo

and the steady humming of the gasoline motor. Then again the spark began to talk—*crash-crash-crack-crack-crrrrash!*—and once more it was safe to speak.

"He warned me strictly to say nothing of this either to you or to the servants, but told me to go and call both you and Chang—that he wanted you at once."

"No explanation——?"

"None; he seemed to think it superfluous—with me."

Coast's fears conjured up a miscarriage of Appleyard's plans. Somehow, perhaps, the little man had failed to regain Quick's Hole in time to prevent the escape of either the *Corsair* or her crew. In such case the latter would seek the quickest mode of communication with No Man's Land. But (on second thought) if the motor cruiser had been able to work off the shoal, she would have proceeded at once to the island; while if her crew had escaped without the boat, they could not well have found a way to connect by wireless in such short time—the nearest Standard station being that on Montauk Point. . . . No; the warning must have come from outside—possibly from New York. Appleyard's advices to the Treasury Department might have resulted in the premature arrest of Voorhis, Vice-President of the Standard—undoubtedly a prime factor in the conspiracy; and news of such moment would promptly

have been flashed out to No Man's Land. . . . Or, again: Appleyard had spoken fondly of commandeering the services of a revenue cutter just then cruising in the neighbourhood of Nantucket. Wireless instructions to that vessel might possibly have been picked up by Blackstock's detector, and, especially if not couched in code, have given him the alarm. . . .

But speculation was just then outside Coast's concerns. His first, his whole only duty was to Katherine.

"Don't worry," he begged her in a hurried whisper; "we'll find some way out. Appleyard won't fail us—and if he should I'll manage to steal that boat and get you off. Either that way or another. . . . Now go, while I see what he wants of me. I'll say I met you on the way. Go quickly—we've delayed long enough . . . *heart of my heart!*"

This last was in an undertone as the woman, taking fright because of a brusque cessation of the wireless racket, disengaged her hand, and with the briefest glance by way of adieu, hurried toward the farm-house.

Alone, he lingered for a little where she left him, striving to collect and train his faculties against this unanticipated turn of events. Thoroughly mystified, disturbed and depressed, he drifted into a deep and sombre reverie which might well have endured be-

yond his knowledge had not the stationary motor chosen an early moment to choke up with a series of guttural snorts and stop dead. The unlooked-for suspension of its contented working song left a distinctly audible void in the stillness, in which the key of the droning dynamo ran down the scale to a sour whine ere it ceased altogether. Roused by this, Coast pulled himself together and hurried round the building, listening with shameless elation to the storm of anger which followed Blackstock's recognition of the mishap.

A chair scraped roughly on the floor and fell with a crash; something else was thrown violently down; Blackstock got his breath deliberately and—the doors and windows of the operating-room became jammed with blasphemy. Discreetly Coast paused and waited until the man's tongue began to falter, until the oaths escaped from him a trickle rather than a deluge, until he stopped short, his system wrung dry of profanity. Then Coast advanced.

He found Blackstock striding to and fro and mumbling a cigar, the scowl that darkened his countenance suggesting a state of perturbation and anxiety no less acute than Coast's. Even without Katherine's warning, and ignoring his pettish rage over the balky motor, Coast would have been quick to guess that something had happened seriously to complicate the man's schemes. He flew every sign pecu-

liar to one who to the physical unhappiness following a night of dissipation has had added grave reason for mental disquiet.

He was in shirt and trousers only with his stockinged feet in loose, heedless slippers that flapped noisily as he walked. Unshaven and slightly inflamed, his face had undergone a notable change since last Coast had seen it; a photographer would have said it was a little out of focus, an artist that its values were blurred and out of key; his features, never sharp or delicate, now seemed swollen and distorted, somehow heightening the satyric resemblance. Faintly red of rim, his prominent eyes had the hard lustre of ebony buttons; beneath them the lids were puffed. A few dank locks of hair evidently long a stranger to the comb strayed stringily down over his broad, pugnacious forehead, black against its pallor. In his plump and swarthy cheeks there were hints of hollowness, and his wide and full underlip sagged pendulous. From nose to mouth the furrows had deepened. . . . An ensemble little less than repulsive. Never in Coast's knowledge of him had he bodied forth so blatantly the type he stood for, the creature of crude passions, undisciplined and violent, strong as a force of Nature, weak with the weakness of one pliant to that force, knowing no law save of its making and by those very laws confounded and destroyed. . . .

With all his evident preoccupation, his senses were keenly on the alert, the quickness with which he picked up the all but inaudible sounds of Coast's approach strongly bearing out the claims the woman made for the acuteness of his hearing. As the younger man drew near Blackstock stopped short, facing the door with a lowering look.

"Who's that?" he demanded sharply, with a nervous gesture plucking the unlighted cigar from between his teeth. "You, Handyside?"

Coast entered. "Mrs. Black said you wished to see me. . . ."

"I would to God I could!" Blackstock cried wrathfully, dashing the cigar upon the floor. He lifted his clenched hands and shook them above his head, while his features twitched. Abruptly he dropped them. "Here," he said curtly, "what d'you know about stationary motors? Everything, I suppose?"

"Not quite," returned Coast pacifically.

"Then what the devil are you doing here?"

"I'm supposed to be a wireless operator——"

"Oh, y'are, eh?"

"Not a skilled mechanic," Coast continued evenly. "Still, I know a little something about motors. Anything I can do?"

"You can take a look at that damned engine, if you don't mind. It fainted dead just now. It hasn't

had any attention since Power quit and left me in the lurch, hang him! I don't know whether it's oil or gas or water it needs. Perhaps you do."

"I'll see," said Coast.

With an impatient grunt Blackstock resumed his walk, guiding himself in and out amongst the furniture and machinery cluttering the room with his habitual but still extraordinary ease.

At the back of the room, Coast instituted a rather cursory examination; he did not greatly care whether he could make the motor run or not, and, singularly enough, since entering the room had received a deep if tangible impression that Blackstock was almost equally indifferent—that the motor had selected a time to stop when its usefulness to him was practically terminated, and had so provided an excuse for an explosion of rage incited by some wholly uncorrelated circumstance. It seemed most improbable that he should announce his intention of quitting the island before his plans were perfected; his resentment, therefore, was in all likelihood mostly directed against the swing of affairs which had decided him upon that move at a time inopportune and inconvenient.

Furthermore, it was not to start a balky motor that he had been summoned. . . .

The sound of Blackstock's footsteps ceased behind him, while he was bending over the machine, and he

was conscious of the uneasy sensation of being watched—which, of course, was absurd, the man's affliction brought to mind.

"Well . . .?"

"Haven't located it yet," said Coast, though this was not strictly true: he could already hazard a shrewd guess, with the confession of neglect to guide him.

"*Mmmm. . . .* Look here, what d'you suppose became of the *Corsair*?"

"One guess is as good as another, isn't it?"

"What d'you mean by that?"

"That I don't know."

"You'd think Finn 'ud 've managed to get her off by this time—eh? Wouldn't you?" Blackstock grumbled.

"Without outside help, I'd judge it a pretty tough job."

"Well, but with help . . ."

"Not so easy to get, under the circumstances. That wind was enough to clear the Sound of ordinary traffic, and even to-day, up to some time after noon at least, there'd be a fairly rugged sea running to keep smaller craft at home."

"Oh, you think so, eh?" commented Blackstock with an accent of irony that made Coast straighten up and look over his shoulder. But the man was not even facing him, and he could gather little from

his expression. "That's all very well," he continued, "but it happens I advised Voorhis of their fix last night, and he sent a tug down from Vineyard Haven this morning. The tug reports no sign of the *Corsair*. Now what d'you know about that?"

"It's not easy to explain," said Coast in perhaps too placid a tone. It was difficult to subtract from his voice the exultation he felt. So Appleyard had been successful, after all! That was a moiety of news to cheer his heart wonderfully. He ventured an obvious and irritatingly stupid observation: "Then they must have got off somehow, during the night."

"Looks that way, doesn't it—even to a blind man? But then——?"

"Perhaps some accident to the machinery——"

"Finn never permits an accident to machinery under his care."

"You never can tell——"

"Finn can," Blackstock snapped decidedly.

"You ought to have him here, then," said Coast disgustedly, turning the conversation of deliberate intent, by now fully convinced that Blackstock had been talking to kill time—or else to make it, for some occult purpose. "You've about ruined this machine, as far as I can judge. The lubricating tank's dry as a bone, the bearings so hot I can't bear my hand on them, and the chances are the con-

necting-rod babbitt has burned out. I can't tell how bad it is without taking the motor down, and that's an expert's job. Where's your cylinder oil? A good dose of that will ease matters a bit until I can investigate without blistering my hands."

"Over there—that large can in the corner," Blackstock indicated.

To reach it Coast had to pass between the man and the door; as he did so, temporarily off his guard, Blackstock stepped suddenly to his side. Grasping Coast's right wrist with his left hand, he thrust it up smartly, interposing his shoulder to prevent it from coming down as he released it and simultaneously passed his own right arm across Coast's chest, seizing and pinioning his left. Having him thus helpless in one of the simplest of jiu-jutsu holds, Blackstock thrust his left hand into Coast's pocket, withdrew the automatic pistol and let him go with a shove that sent him reeling and staggering back against the wall.

"I've been wanting this toy ever since you mentioned it last night," he said calmly, balancing the weapon in his palm. "It's one of my rules that no arms shall be carried on the island, and fearing you might refuse me——"

Coast waited to hear no more. Dumb with rage—to be so tricked and bamboozled! to have his teeth drawn in such a manner, by a blind man, al-

most without a struggle!—he stooped, picked up a heavy monkey-wrench, and threw himself at Blackstock.

Before he had covered half the scant distance between them, however, he was caught up suddenly from behind, jerked back and held, struggling, kicking, helpless as a child in the arms of Chang.

As if he were wholly unaware of what was taking place, Blackstock's voice rumbled on: ". . . adopted this means of making my wishes known. I trust you won't resent it when you wake up to the reasonableness of my attitude. You weren't hurt—of that I'm sure—beyond your feelings, perhaps. And," he added, suavely sardonic, "I beg to apologise for the indignity, Mr. Handyside."

XVII

To his own advantage Coast was gifted with the ability to recognise the irremediable and concede it as such. With quiet resolution he calmed himself at that moment when he was cold with despair, thrilled with apprehension, hot with anger, trembling with humiliation, and powerless in the grasp of one to whom his most determined struggles were as impotent as the writhings of the butterfly whose wings you imprison between thumb and forefinger. The arms the big Chinaman wound round him were as sinewy and long as those of a gorilla, as strong as bands of steel; he could as readily break their embrace as he could summon a jinnee to his aid by twisting the ring upon his finger.

He schooled himself to resignation. "Very well," he said in a passionless voice. "You've got your own way of making a civil request, and I don't pretend to like it; but I'll be grateful if you'll instruct this Chinese giant to let me go."

"What! are you there, Chang?" Blackstock's simulation of surprise was admirable—if it were simulation. "You may release Mr. Handyside," he continued; "he has promised to be good."

Without a word the Chinaman dropped his arms and stepped aside. His face, when Coast saw it, was as stolid as always; only the yellow eyes, glinting like a cat's through their heavy, half-closed lids, seemed to hold a hint of derision.

Coast lifted his shoulders in a shrug not of bravado but of endurance, turned to the tool bench by the motor and replaced the wrench. His thoughts were all confusion; again an incident mocked him with hidden meaning. What was he to understand—that Blackstock had recognised his voice and knew him for himself, Garrett Coast? That he suspected him of being another than Handyside—a spy of the Treasury Department, in short—and had determined to disarm him as a matter of common precaution, suspending sentence until he had determined precisely who he was? Or merely that the man had chosen to show his resentment of Coast's defiance of the night before, when his reference to the pistol had argued potently to free his throat of Blackstock's hands? Had he been already tried, condemned and sentenced (to the bowstring?) or had his weapon been taken from him simply to insure against possible treachery? If Blackstock had satisfied himself that Coast was identical with the putative Handyside, why did he grant him so much as a minute's grace? Was he holding his hand only until nightfall, perhaps, that darkness might cloak a darker deed? And

why, if such were the case and such his purpose, did he keep up the appearance of accepting Coast for Handyside—calling him by that person's name even after all necessity for pretence had been done away with?

He searched the man's face with eyes as shrewd as his misgivings, and found it as little legible as the face of Chang. A suggestion of a grim smile played round the too-wide and fleshy mouth, but the eyes were set, inscrutable, no less enigmatic than his motives: eyes as dull and hard as the sculptured eyes of a Sphinx set in the mask of a Satyr, seeming in spite of their infirmity to seek and meet Coast's eyes and hold them with their blind and steadfast glare.

"You're wondering," said Blackstock, "why I didn't demand this gun before taking it by force. Aren't you?"

"I am," Coast assented bluntly.

"For one reason, because I wouldn't 've got it. Would I?"

"Certainly not. What right——"

"One moment: I'm coming to that." Blackstock smiled his secret smile, weighing the weapon reflectively before bestowing it securely in a hip-pocket. "It was a matter of discipline—*morale* is the better word. You had to be made to understand that on this island I am dictator, my word law, my wishes law's equivalent. Your personal independence

doesn't amount to a row of tacks, so long's your're on No Man's Land; I'm boss, and you've got to come to me. I don't allow anybody but myself to tote a gun here, and since I knew you'd refuse a request, I took this spectacular means of making our relations clear as daylight. The main trouble with Power was his exaggerated conception of the importance of his blessed ego; when I gave him a practical demonstration of its relative insignificance in the cosmic scheme, he got peevish. Don't you make the same mistake."

"I'm surprised," retorted Coast, deliberately offensive, "that Power didn't beg to be allowed to stay and lick your boots."

"That," said Blackstock with an open grin, "sounds suspiciously like mutiny, Mr. Handyside."

"Call it any name you like. Possibly you may find somebody to knuckle under to such treatment for the privilege of earning a bare living on this God-forsaken island, but . . . Well, it wasn't Power and it won't be me. I've had enough of you and I'm finished. Get Voorhis to send you another man as soon as you like: I leave, the first chance that turns up."

"Then the sooner you get that motor running, the quicker you'll be suited," returned Blackstock. "You'd better get busy."

"Go to the devil," said Coast coolly. "If you

send out any messages from this station, someone else will have repaired your motor—I shan't. Good-night!"

"*Good-night*, Mr. Handyside," rang in his ears accompanied by a jeering laugh, as he swung on his heel and through the door to the open; but he paid no attention.

Although thoroughly aroused, he was not in the least degree angry. He had chosen his path of conduct carefully and with due consideration. From the first he had suspected Blackstock intended to provoke an open rupture, in order to get rid of his self-appointed assistant throughout the few remaining hours he contemplated spending on No Man's Land. And to disappoint him by too meek a show of submission would have served only to betray himself; no man of any spirit whatever could be expected to bow to such arbitrary insolence. To pretend to do so would be merely to plant suspicion in a mind as penetrating as Blackstock's.

Whether or not the man had fathomed the substitution of Coast for Handyside remained an open question, but the fact that he intended to free himself from any sort of espionage was patent; he had plotted the scene for that sole purpose—or so Coast read it. And all this considered, a high head and a brow of brass had seemed most becoming to his rôle. So long as Blackstock continued in the part of the

hoodwinked, whether counterfeit or true, just so long Coast was determined to "act up to him."

Reviewing the change, he found that he was not wholly displeased with the new phase. At worst he had become a free agent, bound to no further service to lend semblance of plausibility to his masquerade—that baldly forged personality which already had passed without open challenge far longer than he had believed or even hoped it might. And in great measure his purpose had already been accomplished. Though his single setback had proven disastrous, hopes remained for him to husband: Appleyard would never fail him. . . .

Taking a semblance of angry haste, the assumed indignation with which he flung out of the wireless room carried him quickly round the bungalow; but though he slowed down for a glance into the living room, he saw nothing of Katherine. He presumed she must be in her bedroom, making a dutiful show of packing up.

Lacking any excuse to linger in the vicinity of the bungalow, he continued at leisure toward the farmhouse, consistently at every step more troubled with doubts, anxieties, forebodings. It was all very well (he thought) to make the best of a bad business; but—Appleyard was not to return until nightfall. It was now half-past four of a sultry, overcast and misty afternoon. In the two and a half or three hours of

daylight to follow, what might not happen? What if Blackstock purposed leaving No Man's Land in the little catboat within that interim? What could possibly be contrived to stop him by one man, unfriended and unarmed? . . .

Pausing at the farm-house only briefly to make sure Katherine was not there, without purpose, in weary despondency, he wandered on, down through the Cold Lairs toward the beach

As he drew near the spot where the collie kept its vigil, the animal, apparently recognising his foot-steps, rose and whined a woe-begone welcome. He stopped out of sheer compassion, sensible of a vague feeling of fellowship with the dog, since he, too, was outcast, defenceless and impotent, the sport of malign circumstances. That thought rankled. . . .

Presently it occurred to him that the dog must be hungry. On sudden impulse he left it, went back to the farm-house kitchen, and without word of explanation to the Chinese there, foraged for scraps until he had heaped a pan with food; with which he returned to the collie.

It ate ravenously, as if breaking a long fast. And while he stood watching it, wondering at the dumb fidelity which had kept it steadfast beside the grave though it slowly starved—he heard a faint cry from seaward, turned in surprise, and saw Katherine stumbling hurriedly up from the beach. Though

she had evidently been running for some distance and was flushed and breathless, there was something more than haste in her manner; there was its stimulus, a commingling of strong emotions so interdependent and confused that he found them unintelligible and recognised only intense excitement into which they merged.

When he hastened to meet her, the dog bolting avidly the last shreds of meat and bread, followed sniffing at his heels.

So strong was her agitation that she seemed forgetful of everything but her need of him, turning to him for protection, reassurance, guidance, as though he were their only source. Even in his perplexity and deep concern, he understood this and was glad.

She was stumbling with exhaustion as they met and would have fallen had he not caught her hands; then for a moment longer she could not speak for panting, and clung to him in trembling, a frantic question in her eyes.

"Garrett," she gasped at length—"Garrett—I want you to tell me the truth, if you know it—the truth, Garrett, though I'm afraid to hear it . . ." She paused, shuddering, the crimson ebbing from her cheeks and lips while terror played like lightning in her eyes.

Cautiously he looked round. . . . But the de-

sented buildings shut them off from the farm-house, and there was no one visible on the bluffs or downs. He took her tenderly in his arms.

"There," he soothed her gently. "Tell me . . ."

"I'm afraid," she breathed brokenly. "It's too awful, Garrett, too dreadful. It can't be true . . ."

"Tell me," he begged, though now he knew.

"It's—about Mr. Power, Garrett. I—I—he never left this island."

"I know," he said.

She drew away, her eyes widening. "*You* knew, Garrett?"

"They—" he stammered—"It happened yesterday morning, just before I came ashore—about day-break."

Her colour was that of ashes, but she was holding herself in hand. So sometimes in the chemistry of human emotions a trace of horror added to hysteria will serve as a precipitant.

"You—you know this to be so?"

He told her briefly what and how he knew of the tragedy. "This dog," he concluded, "has been there—you must have noticed—by his grave ever since."

She nodded. "I saw him," she said in a low, vibrant voice, "but—I didn't understand. I remember thinking it strange. He was here when we came—a legacy from the former tenant—and Power was

kind to him. He never would have anything to do with any of the rest of us—except me; Mr. Power fed him and he followed him everywhere, but my—*he* the dog hated, and the Chinese, too.”

The brief explanation had helped to quiet her; but now as she stood staring blankly seaward, tears trembled in her lashes, and her lips trembled as she breathed convulsively.

“It’s so terrible,” she said in a dull and even monotone, dispirited and cheerless. “Was I born only to bring suffering and terror and death to all about me?”

“Don’t say such things,” Coast pleaded wretchedly. “Just a little longer and——”

“But nothing can ever make me forget, Garrett. . . . Mr. Power was kind—I don’t believe especially high-principled or good—but he was thoughtful as to me and resented *his* treatment of me. It was because of that they were constantly at odds—and now, because of that . . . Oh, Garrett, Garrett!” she sobbed.

Silent, who knew no words to comfort her, he let her grief spend itself in his embrace. When she was more composed, he ventured a question that had been troubling him ever since she had betrayed her fears: How had she learned of this?

“It was the boat—the boat they said he stole,” she explained listlessly. “I remember thinking at

the time it wasn't like him—that he would have waited until the fog cleared, and then would have taken the sail-boat. He knew a great deal about the water, and knew that the tides run very strong between here and Squibnocket.” She named the nearest point on Martha's Vineyard. “I thought it strange he should try to row across with nothing to guide him and the danger of being swept out to sea——”

“But this boat—you say you found it—the row-boat?” Coast demanded excitedly.

“Yes. When I had called Chang, I went down to the beach. I wanted to be alone, so that I might think. To-day has been dreadful to me—alone there with him, the man I was married to, knowing he was a murderer: always fearing he suspected and trying to behave as if nothing had happened——”

Coast folded her close. “I know, I know,” he said softly.

At their feet the dog stirred restlessly, whimpering; and alarmed, the woman deftly disengaged herself, with a terrified glance up the straggling, deserted street. But still they were gratefully if desperately alone and unwatched.

“Then—the shock of being told we were to leave the island . . . I wanted to think. . . . I went west along the beach, without noticing—some distance beyond the western point. Then suddenly I

found the boat, drawn up close under the bluff, invisible from above. . . . At first I thought it meant Mr. Power had come back, and then I saw how unlikely that was, and tried to explain it. And suddenly it came to me—the real meaning of it. And I hurried to find you . . .”

“Thank God!” said Coast.

She looked up, wondering at his tone.

“I mean it’s one way out,” he said soberly; “a mighty slim chance—but yet a chance: I mean, the boat. I’ve been puzzling all along—if worst came to worst, there was the catboat—but how to get you aboard her? You couldn’t swim that far . . .” She shook her head. “I could; but even then would it be possible to work her inshore and take you aboard unobserved? For if they saw us, I’d be under fire and . . . Blackstock has my pistol,” he ended lamely.

She uttered a low cry of distress; but he could only shake his head in melancholy confirmation of the tidings, detailing the way Blackstock had seized the weapon.

“But now,” he wound up with a sorry show of optimism, “it’s another story. With the rowboat, we can get off. As things stand, Appleyard . . . Well, we’d better not risk waiting for him. The cat lies out of easy range, and if they try to swim out to stop us, I can beat them off with a boathook or an

oar. **I** think we can make it—at least, it's worth trying. I'll go now and have a look at that boat."

She drew a deep breath, with a nod endorsing this forlorn hope. "Very well," she said tersely. "Go, then. I must hurry back, for fear *he* may miss me. . . . Yes, I can brave it out; don't worry—I shant let him suspect. . . . And there's another reason," she continued stubbornly, when he tried to object: "I can get you a revolver if I go back. Yes, my own. I have it in my trunk; I'm sure *he* doesn't know of it, for I never thought to show it him. It is loaded, too; and I can get it easily. . . . Now I *will* go."

Doubting, he let her have her way. It was true, what she said: a too prolonged absence from the bungalow would be certain to excite Blackstock's suspicions. After all, it was only another chance taken: and one more or less seemed insignificant compared with the sum total of those they were agreed to risk.

"Very well," he consented reluctantly. "They won't miss me, that's sure; but you . . . Try to slip away about dusk. Make some excuse, and—I'll be waiting here, all prepared. And . . . make sure of that revolver, first thing you get back. Take care of yourself above all things. . . . Oh, don't worry about me; *he* doesn't; with my fangs drawn,

I'm no longer a factor in his calculations. . . . Go, then, and—God keep you, Katherine."

He could imagine the effort that her brave smile at parting cost her. . . .

Unsmiling, sombrely thoughtful, he watched her away, then hurried down to the beach.

Ten minutes of steady walking brought him to the place where he had bathed that morning—ages ago! A scant hundred feet further on, at the very foot of the bluff that arched a slightly concave face above it, lay a rowboat, bottom up, screened by a huge boulder. Hope palpitant in his bosom, leaping and dying like a candle in the wind, he hastened to it, bent over, hands beneath the thwart, and stood it on its side. A low cry of disappointment sighed out from his lips. He let the boat fall back to its original position.

There were neither oars nor rowlocks. . . .

Despair blackened the sky for him. He swung about mechanically, in a daze of frustrated hope, and started back, plodding heavily as with weighted feet.

Fifty yards away from the boat, a resounding crash behind him brought him to the about face with a start.

Whether by accident of nature or human design a portion of the overhanging bluff, just at its verge,

had given way, precipitating upon the boat, in a cloud of pebbles, earth and dust, a rock several hundred pounds in weight; one entire side of the dory had been crushed in.

Coast's gaze ranged upward. Along the edge of the bluff nothing moved.

He listened intently. Not a sound . . .

A pale smile edged his troubled lips. "Check!" he said; and with a shrug resumed the backward way.

Unheeded at his heels the blind dog dragged, muzzle and tail adroop, uttering now and then a woeful whine so faint that it seemed hardly more than a sigh. . . .

XVIII

EVENING was advancing in utter calm when Coast regained the beach before the deserted village. The wind had died away to mere vagrant breaths, barely strong enough to darken that dully polished, unquiet floor of water, widening in loneliness from those desolate, fog-bound shores.

Pausing beside the beached catboat Coast stared hungrily at the little vessel off shore, gently swinging at its mooring. How to reach her, how make use of her if needs must? . . . He shook his head in doubt, strongly assured now that he would set foot upon her decks only through exercise of force.

His hopes reverted now to Appleyard as the last resort. Without the little man and the *Echo*—or some other boat—he was powerless, a figure for the mirth of his enemies.

Twilight closed down slowly in soft, formless shadows; a shade of violet tinged the drifting draperies of mist. The hush was absolute. Vainly he listened for the sound of muffled drumming that should herald the return of the motor-driven *Echo*;

he heard nothing other than the stealthy lisp and lapping of the crawling tide.

At his feet the blind dog crouched, motionless as stone, seeming to search the infinite with the unwinking stare of its dead, colourless eyes. . . .

Abruptly a sound of pelting feet transformed the scene. The blind dog lifted up with a jump and faced round, growls rumbling in its throat. Coast turned, startled and apprehensive.

Down the way to the beach Chang was running at a curious, outlandish jog-trot, head low between his broad, gaunt shoulders. Apparently he was heading directly for Coast.

With a little thrill of fear the American glanced round for some means of defending himself. He had no doubt that the Chinaman had been commissioned to dispose of him even as poor Power had been done away with. In a sudden flush of anger he laid hold of the first thing that caught his eye—which happened to be the half-rotted tiller of the catboat, a heavy and formidable club if it did not break with the initial blow—and moved a pace or two forward, holding himself in a position of defence.

But within a hundred yards the Chinaman swerved widely, then held on steadily toward the northern sand spit. A moment or two later he arrived at the water's edge, and while Coast stared half stupefied, stopped and stripped to his linen drawers, then took

to the water, wading out until he lost footing, then swimming with long, powerful, overhand strokes, straight off for the catboat.

Watching the round, shaven poll with its coiled pigtail cut swiftly through the glimmering silvery-sheet of water, Coast lost himself in anxious speculation until recalled by a quick movement of the dog at his side, accompanied by a deep-throated growl. He wheeled then to discover Blackstock close upon them, his burly body swaying heavily as he came on at a moderate pace.

A second growl, that more resembled an angry roar, brought the man to a standstill, with a hand moving nervously toward the side pocket of his coat, in which a firearm sagged visibly.

"If you're on speaking terms with that brute," said the man brusquely, "call him off before I take a pot-shot at him."

"Keep your hand clear of that pocket," said Coast sharply, advancing, "or I'll take a chance at you myself."

"You?" Blackstock's thick lips curved, contemptuous. "Take your chance, by all means, with that silly, worm-eaten tiller, if you've got the nerve; but call off that dog, or I'll shoot him dead. I want a little talk with you."

Coast, without ceasing to watch the man, for fear of treachery, had stepped to the dog's side and

caught his fingers in an aged and weather-worn strap round its throat, before he appreciated the full significance of Blackstock's words. Then his jaw dropped and his eyes widened.

"What!" he cried, astounded. His gaze was keen upon the plump, dark, brutish face that leered at him; he saw its small eyes no longer dull and fixed, but twinkling with an evil, impish glitter. The dim suspicion that more than once he had rejected from his thoughts as extravagant and idle, was suddenly resolved into conviction. "So," he said slowly, "you do see, after all!"

"The discovery," said Blackstock with a ponderous affectation of mordant wit, "does credit to your perspicuity. I congratulate you on making it—when I chose to let you."

For a moment occupied with restraining the dog, which seemed half-mad with desire to fly at Blackstock's throat, Coast made no reply. In the light of this revelation the situation was taking on a new and fairly terrifying complexion.

"Of the two of us, I must say you've been the blindest," Blackstock continued in a manner of biting irony that seemed to amuse him. "I wondered from the first how long you'd take to find me out. Kate, of course, I'm accustomed to; I've had her hypnotised so long that she never dreams of questioning the matter, no matter how barefaced I am. But

you—Lord! I thought you'd show more discrimination!" He chuckled grimly, resting an elbow on the side of the careened boat. "You, the knight-errant!" he jерred. "Blind as a bat! Good Lord!"

Coast spoke to the dog and succeeded in quieting it temporarily. "You've been faking all along?" he asked without visible resentment. "Ever since you showed up in court with those smoked glasses?"

He was talking more than for any better reason, to gain time to readjust his viewpoint. Beyond question this disclosure had proven amazing and disturbing enough even to satisfy Blackstock; it lighted up innumerable dark places in Coast's understanding, enriching his plight by half a hundred fresh facets, each clamouring for attention and careful consideration. When he looked back he himself began to wonder that he had been so easy a dupe. Chagrin ate into his *amour propre* like a corrosive acid. In the whirl of new conceptions, thoughts and emotions, he barely heard Blackstock's response.

"Not entirely," he was saying, still with his evil, secret smile. "I don't mind telling you, since you're curious, *Mr. Coast*. I did have the devil's own time with my eyes for a while, and believed I'd lose my sight entirely; I honestly went abroad on their account alone. One of the few honest actions I boast, by the bye—if you don't find the interpolation obnoxious. . . ."

His laugh rang bitterly in Coast's hearing.

"My friends the German specialists, however," he resumed, "worked wonders; I found my strength of vision returning, but was temporarily amused to continue the make-believe; it was immensely diverting for a time. I received consideration that I wouldn't have, otherwise, and I saw a lot I wasn't expected to see. And then, slowly, as I began to see more and more clearly, I realised the immense advantage it would give me to keep on pretending. . . . You can figure it out yourself, from your own ridiculous experience."

A slow, dark flush coloured Coast's face. "Then," he asked a trace thickly, "why are you giving yourself away, now?"

"Because it diverts me extraordinarily, by your leave," Blackstock told him with unconcealed amusement. "Your mortified look, your annoyance—it's rich, my word it is! Besides, the necessity of keeping you in the dark's eliminated. In an hour, my giddy squire of dames, I'll be bidding you a fond farewell. It's been a very pretty farce, while it lasted, and I'm immensely obligated to you for making such an uncommon ass of yourself for my benefit, but the curtain's about to ring down. Hence these epilogue."

"What," said Coast slowly, "do you think you mean?"

"Literally what I'm announcing to you." Black-

stock yawned affectedly. "The plain truth is," he continued with a mocking pretence of candour, "I'm a bit bored by this place. It's served its purpose well enough—I owe it no particular ill-will; and I've had my fling down here and made my bit of ready money; but now,—no thanks to you, by the bye—this neck of the woods is growing a trace too hot for me. So I'm going to beat it and leave you cock of the roost."

"You mean you're going to try to escape in that catboat?" Coast nodded toward the craft in question without removing his regard from Blackstock.

"That tub? Never-r-r! No—inquisitive! but I don't mind—I'm going to go away from here in a nice little, tight little motor-boat that's now on the way down from New Bedford, kindness of the same friends who sent me the *Corsair*—which you interfered with. As for that shell out there,—I guess not!"

"Then why . . ."

"See for yourself," Blackstock nodded.

Coast turned to look—retaining with some difficulty his grasp upon the dog-collar. Intermittently while Blackstock talked the blind collie had been making vicious attempts to break away, apparently infuriated by the man's harsh and sardonic accents. And mechanically Coast had been restraining him.

Indistinctly in the failing light he made out the tall, gaunt figure of the Chinaman poised with lifted

arms on the gunwale of the boat, preparing to dive; and he received a vague impression that the boat itself was riding lower in the water. At first he failed to make the connection between the two. Then, as he watched, Chang leapt lightly up and out, turned in midair and entered the water as neatly as an arrow, with barely a perceptible splash.

"You see," commented Blackstock with a note of impatience, "I thought I'd remove at least one burden from your already overstrained intelligence."

His insolence fanned to a flame the smouldering resentment in Coast's bosom. "What the devil are you getting at?" he demanded hotly.

"You," returned Blackstock, unmoved. "I had an idea you were making sheeps' eyes at my little boat, so I decided to deliver you from temptation, and sent Chang out to scuttle her. A simple matter—watch her settling, now!—just a strong twist of the wrist and out comes our bilge plug and in comes the water and—down she goes!"

Coast, choking with despair and rage, in silence saw the prediction verified to its bitterest letter. Then he swung back to his tormentor, quivering with indignation even as the dog he held quivered and strained against restraint.

"Damn you!" he cried despite himself.

Blackstock laughed again, by all tokens enjoying himself immensely. "But why?" he asked lightly.

"Why damn me for taking a simple measure towards self-preservation—obeying Nature's first law, and all that sort of thing? I want you to stick here until to-morrow morning, at the earliest; that gives me a chance to make a clean get-away. Why should I leave you the means to gum up my plans? Thanks, I'm many kinds of a fool, I know, but not that bad!"

"You'll never leave this island free," Coast muttered.

"Eh, what's that? Oh, you think not—so? Believe me, my gay gallant, I'm wise to all you're banking on. It's true you had me guessing for a time—I wasn't sure about you at first; that immature beard you've been growing recently is quite some disguise, and besides you'd changed your way of talking; his lordship's languid drawl was missing; and you look like any other ordinary mutt, out of your pretty clothes—but I got your number in due course of time. That break you made about the gun when I was pulling my bluff about knowing people by the feel of their faces—you forgot yourself then, and I hadn't any more doubts. I did some tall figuring before I got completely hep, but a little work with wireless rounded the story out. You see, you had the yarn of the *Corsair's* trouble down too pat and glib for it to be without a grain of truth: you gave me that much to go on. . . . And then—well, we knew one man certainly, and probably two, had been

on the island in the fog yesterday morning and butted in on the funeral obsequies of my ill-advised young assistant, Power, and it didn't seem in reason they'd be content to let the matter rest at that—'specially after going to the trouble of breaking Chang's head in return for being shot at. . . . So I got busy, as I say, and the fog helping I fixed things up very prettily."

He paused an instant, but Coast would not be drawn. He was waiting and wondering how long he could contain himself—no less difficult a task than to hold back the dog. The shame of his position, out-generaled and derided by this common criminal, his dupe and laughing-stock, was stinging him to madness. . . . He glanced warily askance, down the beach; Chang was just wading inshore. Secretly he tightened his grip upon the tiller, while Blackstock rambled on in boastful triumph.

"I warned Voorhis—he's sloping for safety now; sent the tug after the *Corsair*, unhappily too late—it's evident your friend, the Secret Service sleuth—"

"How did you guess that?" Coast demanded huskily.

"Considering what I've been up to, what was the likeliest guess? I wasn't sure until you gave it away just now—merely satisfied such was the case. . . . Well, as I was saying, I worked the wireless pretty steadily—was happy enough to pick up a mes-

sage to the *Scylla*—a Revenue cutter, I take it—ordering her here to bust up a nest of smugglers; and spiked that gun with another message, a couple of hours later, revoking the order as being based on false information. And, finally, I got my friends on the mainland to make up a little party to fetch me off. So, all things being pleasant as afternoon tea, I came down to gloat over you a little. Hope you don't mind."

"Why," said Coast—"since you'd made up your mind about me—why did you hold off this long? To laugh at me?"

"Partly, Mr. Coast, partly. There were other reasons. One was, I don't bear you any ill-will: which you'll allow is pretty decent of me, considering the rotten way I've treated you. I don't kill in cold blood without a pretty good reason. Van Tuyl's mouth *had* to be shut, you know—or rather, you don't know why, and likely never will; and Power was threatening to split on the game here, so he had to be taken care of. But you . . . I'll be candid: to begin with your life wasn't worth a tallow-dip; I made up my mind to eliminate you with neatness and despatch—when your back was turned, for choice. But then I began to think the game was about up, so far as No Man's Land was concerned. So, what was the use of making a bad matter messy? You were harmless, and I didn't hate you hard enough to

want you murdered—unless you made it necessary. So I voted for the laugh instead of the funeral.”

“Do you think for an instant I intend to let you go?”

“You? What ’ve you got to say about it? Don’t be silly; I’m going—and not to the electric chair, either. I shall just quietly drop out of your ken for good and all—and some day you’ll be grateful. Look what a cute little island I’m making you a present of—God knows I’ve no further use for it: you’re welcome. Same way with my wife: I was rather fond of her, once, but now you can have her. Of course there’ll be some delay about the blessed respectability end of it—the divorce—grounds—desertion—and all that—but still, if you’re half as keen a lover as you are a fool——”

“You contemptible hound!”

“Steady, there!” Blackstock’s voice dropped to a dangerous key. “Remember——”

He found no time to finish. As he spoke, Coast, beside himself, released the dog and whirled the tiller above his head. With a grunt Blackstock stepped back, tugging at the weapon in his pocket; but before he could draw it the dog, free and frantic with hatred, launched itself like a bolt for his throat and, blind though it was, springing by instinct toward the sound of his voice, found its mark. Coast’s bludgeon, sweeping for his head with deadly ac-

curacy, none the less missed its mark, so quickly the dog staggered and carried Blackstock off his feet.

In a twinkling they were down, Blackstock underneath, grappling madly with the frenzied collie whose jaws were snapping wickedly at his throat.

Almost beside himself, Coast retained sufficient presence of mind to recognise his golden chance. Dropping his club, he went to his knees at Blackstock's side and with swift, sure hands rifled his pockets, possessing himself of the pistol which had been taken from him or its counterpart. Dully, while thus employed, he was aware of a shout and a scream, oddly blended. The fear of Chang uppermost in his consciousness, he jumped to his feet, armed and alert, and whirled about.

But everything had taken place so swiftly and with so little warning, that the Chinaman, quick though he was to take the alarm and start at top speed for the scene of the struggle, was still many yards distant when Coast arose, without a scruple leaving Blackstock at the mercy of the dog.

He saw Chang coming and saw him stop and level a revolver. Simultaneously he heard a shot—but from another quarter and another weapon than the Chinaman's. The latter, gleaming in the half light, suddenly flew out of his hand and to one side, falling in shallow water, while Chang grabbed his right hand with his left and doubled like a jack-

knife over it, screaming with agony. In mute amaze, Coast, seeking the source of this timely assistance, discovered Katherine standing with her revolver still uplifted, half-way between the Cold Lairs and the beached catboat.

He marvelled at her. In this moment of trial and terror, she retained her wits and courage in a manner calculated to command the homage of a veteran of many wars. The instant after Coast caught sight of her, she fired again, planting a bullet shrewdly at the very feet of the Chinaman.

"Get back!" she called clearly. "Back—or I'll shoot to kill!"

Chang not only heard, but in all his pain and blank amazement understood. Without a breath's delay he turned his back and, nursing his injured hand, trotted sullenly off, to eastward down the beach.

Coast woke the echoes with a shout. "Well done, Katherine! Look to him now—while I——"

He turned back to Blackstock and the dog, just then a confused and struggling mass in the shadow of the boat. So quickly had Chang been disposed of that Blackstock, for all his tremendous strength and activity, for all that he was pitted against nothing more powerful than a blind and aged if infuriated dog, was only just succeeding in fighting to his knees. Already Coast was closing in to his assistance, forgetful of his hatred and thinking only of aiding him

in that unnatural contest; though always with the thought that they had by the rarest turn of Chance won the whip-hand—when Blackstock rose with a lurch, wrenched the collie from his breast and with a sudden, swift and merciless movement swung the dog above his head and brought it down with tremendous force across the coaming of the boat. There was a single, terrible yelp, and the dog lay inert with a broken back.

Panting and shaken, both hands to his lacerated and bleeding throat, the man staggered a pace or two away, and fell suddenly against the bows of the boat, grasping its stem for support.

Stunned with the surprise of it, Coast turned away, aware that Katherine was calling him.

“Garrett! Garrett!” he heard her cry. “Come—quickly! . . . Don’t you see——?”

She flung an arm seaward and to the west. Following this sign, he saw, perhaps a quarter of a mile off shore and sweeping swiftly in under the urge of a dozen oars, a mackerel-fisher’s seine-boat, crowded to the thwarts with men.

There was no sign of any vessel in the offing. Whither this long-boat could have dropped from defied his most far-fetched guess. He stared agape and thunderstruck until the woman, gaining his side, caught his arm with an imperative hand.

“Garrett!” Her voice was quavering now with

consternation and the reaction from the excitement that had buoyed her up through the last few minutes. "Take me away, take me quickly! There's not a minute . . . The catboat . . . ?"

"Gone," he answered stupidly: "sunk by Chang—Blackstock's orders. We've no chance now—only Appleyard."

"Then, hurry! Don't you see that boat——?"

"Yes, but——"

"They're *his* men—the crew of that schooner—at least, I think so, I'm sure of it. Against them, what chance have we? Let's get away, hide some place until your boat——"

"Right!" He whipped in his wool-gathering faculties. "But—we'll take him with us." He made as if to move for Blackstock, holding that gentleman under cover of his pistol.

But she held him back. "No; he'd only delay us. We must find a place of safety——"

"Right again!" he assented, turning with her and hastening toward the Cold Lairs. "But where——?"

She dragged heavily upon his arm for a moment, gasping and shaken with short, dry sobs. Then bravely she pulled herself up and released him.

"I don't know—some place—we must find some place——"

From behind them came a long-drawn, piercing hail:

"Black, O Black! *Aho-o-oy!*"

Blackstock lifted his head with an effort.

"Aho-oy!" he cried in a shaking voice, and:
"Help!" in a feebler.

And Coast, looking curiously over his shoulder as they toiled up the incline, saw him paw feebly at the side of the boat, then collapse upon the sands beside it, as if fainting.

XIX

By the time they had passed through the Cold Lairs, Katherine's strength began to fail. The rapid pace at which they had made the ascent from the beach had told upon her more than Coast would have realised but for insuppressible evidences of distress she betrayed, her laggard footsteps and her laboured breathing. Passing an arm round her waist, he held her up and gave her what support and help he could, but when they had gained the summit of the first ridge inland, between the farm-house and deserted village, he had to pause and rest.

From that point of vantage, with the broad crescent of the beach spread out beneath their gaze, they watched the landing of the seine-boat.

Like some huge water insect of many legs, black body silhouetted against the silvered sea, it sped in-shore, four long oars to a side dipping and lifting with the rhythmical beat of a perfect piece of machinery. From its stern long ripples widened like plumes, black lines streaming out in long, perfect curves upon the gleaming, steely surface. . . .

Then of a sudden with precise accord the oars were lifted and laid in: at slowly decreasing speed

the long-boat slipped through the shoaling waters and nosed the sands. Four figures leaped overboard and grasping the thwarts hauled the bows high upon the beach. Others followed, some lingering to help drag the long-boat out of the tide's limits, some trotting hurriedly to Blackstock's aid.

With difficulty, because of the momentarily fading light, Coast counted the company of the newcomers; they numbered, as nearly as he could estimate, ten. With Blackstock and Chang, that meant twelve to two—fourteen to two, if he were to include the two coolies in the farm-house.

He withheld a groan of dismay, and tightened his arm round the woman's waist, unconsciously consecrating his life to her defence. Blackstock should recapture her only when he, Coast, had fallen fighting. Outnumbered, with dogged determination, he pitted himself, his wits and strength and fortitude, against them all. He had nothing else to rely upon; and he had inwardly abandoned hope of help from Appleyard before the fog lifted. Undoubtedly it was that which was detaining the little man. . . .

Dimly through the gloaming he saw Blackstock lifted to his feet before the throng closed round him, a vague dark blur about the boat. From the east the tall, gaunt figure of Chang was moving with long and steady strides back to join them.

As yet there was no indication of pursuit.

None the less, Coast stirred uneasily and glanced in solicitude down at the pale oval of the face resting wearily against his shoulder.

"Feeling better?" he inquired gently. "Do you think you can walk, dear?"

She drew in a deep breath and nodded assent. "I'm all right, now," she said, though still her respiration sounded harsh and uneven; "at least, I will be presently. . . . Are they coming?" she added with a start.

"No," he answered. "They're not worrying about us. We can't get far—not off the island. When we're wanted, they'll find us easily enough, I'm afraid. For the present, Blackstock's entertaining them with the story of his misadventure." He laughed shortly. "Come," he said; and they turned again inland, moving at a brisk walk toward the bungalow—with what purpose neither could have said.

"But that seine-boat?" he asked suddenly, a moment later. "Where under Heaven did she drop from? You spoke of the schooner . . .?"

"It's ashore," she told him. "I saw it all from the bungalow. . . . I had been inside, looking for my trunk keys. I couldn't seem to find them at first. *He* was in the wireless-room when I went in, but by the time I found the keys, he had disappeared. I went to the door and stood looking out, wonder-

ing what had become of him and whether I dared risk a return to the beach—and you—while it was still so light; and suddenly the schooner shot out of the mist a little south of the point, over there in the west. She was running under power—I could just hear the engine throbbing—and I don't think they suspected how close they were to the island. At all events, the next instant she struck—stopped short as if she had run against a wall, quite a distance out; and in two minutes her stern was under water. I saw the crew putting out the long-boat and jumping into it; and then I ran down to the beach. . . .”

“She's the one,” he said abstracted—“the schooner Appleyard was after, beyond doubt. You heard them hail Blackstock by name—by the name they know him under.”

[The woman said “Yes,” indifferently, leaning more heavily upon him. . . .]

Out of the dusk, in which objects were just perceptible, the bungalow loomed up before them. By common consent they paused, Coast looking back toward the beach, Katherine peering up into his face.

“Are they coming, Garrett?”

“Not yet,” he said, perplexity in his tone. “It's as I thought: they know they can lay hands on us at any time. So we can go hang until they're ready to take up our case. . . . But,” he amended,

squaring his shoulders and his jaw and infusing his manner with a confidence and decision he had been glad to feel, "we'll fool 'em. It won't be long, now."

"You mean before your friend—Mr. Appleyard?"

"Yes. He's sure to be here at almost any minute—he or the revenue cutter."

"But, Garrett . . . what are we going to do in the meantime?"

"I'm thinking . . ."

"We can't stay here."

"No," he agreed reluctantly. "If there was the slightest show, I'd try to barricade and hold the bungalow, but it isn't strong enough. . . . Have you any extra ammunition?"

"No," she said, distressed.

"Never mind; we've plenty, between us. Only, we'll have to stick to the open till the *Echo* comes. Is there a lantern in the house—anything to make a light with?"

"Why—yes," she replied in surprise; "there's a kerosene lantern we used at night, when it was necessary to go to the farm-house. But . . . wouldn't it lead them to us? Isn't darkness our surest cover?"

"Absolutely; but I've got to have something to signal Appleyard with. We agreed that I should

show a light on the sand spit, in event of any trouble; but he'll be counting on the cutter being here by this time, and it won't do to let him make a landing on the beach near the long-boat."

"I understand. Just a minute . . . Is there time?"

"Plenty," he said briefly, adding inconsistently: "But hurry."

He followed her into the house and, while she disappeared to look for the lantern, found his way to the divan and robbed it of its covering—a heavy steamer rug, which he folded and tucked beneath one arm before Katherine returned.

"You won't want the light now?"

"No. Give me your hand."

She placed in his palm fingers soft, cool, steady and infinitely trustful, and, as one more accustomed to the place, led him to the door.

They stepped out into unrelieved night: darkness, dense and warm and rendered tangible by its burden of humidity.

In the north arose a confusion of many voices; and in that quarter, likewise, was a firefly show of weaving lantern-lights.

Hand in hand they stole away like thieves, not three minutes before the bungalow was invaded by Blackstock and the crew of the schooner—a loud-mouthed, roystering company, making hideous the

night with the clamour of their disputations and their cursings.

Unseen and all unsought (so far as they could say, with no sign given them of either detection or pursuit) they hurried off as warily and fearfully as wild things skirting the haunts of men, skulking silently over hills and down through hollows, over fields and fences, until at length they came without accident out upon the spreading sweep of sand to the east of the long, low-lying spit.

Later they found themselves at the end of this, the northern extremity of the island; and here Coast put down the unlighted lantern and spread the rug in a slight depression between low dunes. . . .

Cimmerian murk encompassed them, abysmal, impassive, penetrated only by dimmed rays of light from the windows of the bungalow, seemingly incalculable miles distant.

The sea washed up close to their refuge, the murmur of its flooding tide not more soft and gentle than the tones in which now and again they spoke to one another.

Invisible to him, she lay at length, resting upon the rug. He sat near her head, watchful and prepared against surprise. Between them, beneath the irk of tedious circumstance, was the peace of perfect understanding.

Slowly the hours ebbed. They had long since ceased to speak. From the regularity of her breath-

ing Coast believed she slept despite her fears, overcome by thorough exhaustion of every fibre, nerve and faculty. For himself he would not stir for fear of waking her.

The light of a lantern peeped over the ridge, inland, and descended, wavering, through the Cold Lairs to the beach, then became stationary near the edge of the water, over which it shot a long, slender spear of soft radiance. Like a ruled line it lay on the oily surface, unbroken, almost imperceptibly waving on the slow, smooth swell.

He understood that a guard had tardily been set over the seine-boat.

From the bungalow came thin, far sounds of voices, now and then a husky shout cacophonous in that hour of calm, immutable peace.

They were drinking up there, forgetful alike of danger and their recent disaster. . . .

Abruptly he saw that the lane of lantern light was shattered and dancing. He jumped to his feet, with a glance above that showed him a faint flash of starlight. He held up his hand and a breath of air blew cool against it—a shiver of breeze out of the southwest. All this meant clearing. . . .

He swung to seawards, trembling in uncontrollable agitation, waiting and watching. At his feet the woman stirred restlessly, murmured in her sleep, and again was still.

Swiftly the breeze freshened. Vague forms of

mist faded before his straining sight. A musical whisper and clashing of waves echoed through the hush of night. And like a curtain the fog fell back and away, and was not.

About two miles offshore, to the northwest, a green light shone like a coloured star, with a white light a little above—at about the height of the *Echo's* masthead. And while he looked the two moved and swung round, until he saw not only green and white, but the red port light as well, all moving steadily toward the island.

XX

IN his arms Katherine moved with a stifled moan of weariness, a gasp, and then a stiffening of her body which told him that she was now wide awake and mistress of her wits, in full comprehension of their position.

“Katherine——”

“What is it?”

“The *Echo*—Appleyard, I think—I’m sure. He’ll be here in just a few minutes—ten or fifteen; and you must help me show the light.”

“Help me up,” she said in a collected voice.

He rose and took her hands, lifting her to her feet. With one thought uppermost in both minds, they turned toward the sea.

By now the fog had been wafted wholly away and the night had opened out its deep tenebrous distances. Almost due north Gay Head blinked gaily and brilliantly, its hot red glare punctuating with unvarying accuracy the swift, sharp stabs of white at every third flash. Over the sombrous sea there lay a sheen of starlight woven of a myriad rays falling through the unclouded skies. And off to the northwest the red port and white masthead lights

of the catboat were slipping briskly shorewards—the green no longer visible—standing in for the beach where the long-boat lay.

A groan escaped Coast.

“Oh, the devil!” he said beneath his breath, exasperated; and aloud, half-frantically: “Hurry! He’s taking the other light for *my* signal. Here”—he grabbed up the steamer rug and thrust it unceremoniously into Katherine’s hand—“hold this so, to hide it from the beach, while I light the lantern.”

Standing with arms wide-stretched she dropped the rug before him like a curtain, and thus screened he got upon his knees, found matches and—lost several precious minutes striking one after another before he succeeded in making the wick catch. Then standing he swung the light to and fro at about the height of his knees, shivering with nervous fear lest Appleyard, his interest focussed on the light ahead, should fail to see his signal.

With agonising slowness the minutes sped, and still the boat held on directly for the beach below the Cold Lairs. Then abruptly the watcher by the long-boat awakened to its approach, apparently for the first time, and sounded the alarm by firing a shot from his revolver. A second later, in desperation, Coast sent a piercing whistle echoing over the waters.

Immediately, at the pistol shot, the *Echo* swerved sharply off to the west, her red side light disappearing; and for a full minute held on so before she swung smartly on her heel and showed first the green and then the red, bearing straight as an arrow for the end of the sand spit.

On the island, at the same time, the results of the report (which, when the catboat came about, was followed by four others in brisk succession) were no less marked. Down the wind from the bungalow floated a wild chorus of shouts and calls. In its vicinity half a dozen twinkling lights studded the darkness on the uplands, springing to life as if by magic, and were whisked hither and thither like so many will-o'-the-wisps, suggesting a stupid, half-distracted ferment of conflicting advice, argument and wills amongst the smugglers. Presently, however, some sort of order was evidently evolved; the lights converged to a common centre and bore swiftly down toward the beach. . . .

Coast put down the lantern on the swelling, rounded summit of a small dune, and took the steamer rug from Katherine, mechanically folding it as he divided troubled attention between the nearing boat and the distant rabble—now streaming headlong down through the Cold Lairs and shouting as they came.

"No more need for this," he said, referring to

the rug; "the light won't tell them anything they don't know, now. But . . ." His perturbed voice trailed off irresolutely as he stood, a frowning glance directed down the beach.

Katherine was quick to catch the note of worry in his tone. "What is it?" she asked. "You're not afraid—you don't think——"

"No," he reassured her stoutly; "they're much too far away to catch us now. Only—hark to that!"

There was, in fact, a strange and sinister sound in the yelping of the gang; their cries were indistinguishable, but owned a dull, level pitch of minatory rage, infinitely perturbing, since it seemed so senseless—like the harsh and inarticulate snarling of an infuriated lunatic.

A shiver shot along Coast's spine. He found the woman, trembling, had moved close to his side.

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know," he said—"sounds like a pack of starving wolves. . . . No matter; it can't concern us. In two minutes . . ."

The *Echo* had drawn near enough for the noise of the motor to be perceptible: she was moving under power only, her sail down but not furled, hanging in stiff and clumsy folds in the lazy-jacks. He could even see the tender trailing astern, and make out a single figure at the wheel. . . . Then the latter bobbed down out of sight for an instant, and

the purring of the engine was abrupted. There followed the splash of the anchor, and the little vessel brought up quickly, swinging wide to face the wind.

With a warning cry Katherine stepped quickly away from Coast and swung round, whipping out her small but effective pearl-handled revolver.

"Stop!" she cried in a vibrant voice. "Halt, or I'll fire!"

Coast, as prompt to take alarm, had instantaneously imitated her action. Wheeling, weapon poised, he discovered the shadowed shape of a man running toward them—or, rather, staggering, for he seemed badly winded—leaping and reeling through the undulations of the low, formless dunes, whose soft and yielding substance had deadened the sound of his approach until he was almost upon the two.

At Katherine's call he flung up one hand as if to signify a peaceful intent, but came on at unabated speed.

"Don't shoot!" he pleaded hoarsely. "I'm unarmed——"

Both knew that voice too well. The woman's figure straightened to rigidity. "Stop!" she repeated, imperative, inflexible. "Stop, Dougias, or——"

Coast threw out a hand and deflected the muzzle of her weapon. "Don't," he said aside; "if it

comes to that, let me attend to him! . . . Blackstock!" he cried curtly. "Stand where you are!"

At this the man pulled up at a distance of a few feet, within the radius of lantern light. "Steady!" he begged between gasps. "I've . . . beaten 'em out. . . . Plenty of time. . . ."

"What's your game now?" demanded Coast coldly, his attention distracted by the comforting sound of dipping oars and squealing rowlocks behind him.

"Game!" The man's eyes caught a curious glint of light from the lantern as they shifted swiftly, glancing sidelong. "Game!" he iterated in broken and hollow tones. "I'm in no shape for games now! For God's sake don't be hard on me. I've come to give myself up—to surrender."

His announcement fell like a thunderclap. Momentarily Coast discredited his sense of hearing. "*Surrender?*" he muttered, incredulous. "*You?*" He cast a quick, cautious look round. There was no one else within the limits of his vision—not a figure nor a moving shadow. His gaze returned to the huge, quaking shape before them: Blackstock in a panic, trembling with fear and exhaustion, his plump face turned a pasty, unwholesome shade and largely blotched with dull, burning red, eyes like knots showing too much white and rolling restlessly, loose mouth a-quiver, hands shaking, breath coming and going

with a sound resembling the exhaust of a skipping motor. "The devil!" said Coast to himself; and aloud in accents hard and unrelenting: "You'd best explain . . .?"

With a sudden movement, the woman touched his arm.

"Don't trust him, Garrett!" she exclaimed. "You know him—don't, don't trust him!"

"I've no intention——" Coast began.

Incontinently they were treated to the incongruous spectacle of Blackstock on his knees, humbling himself first to the woman, then to the man he had wronged, fat, mottled, tremulous hands imploring them. "No!" he prayed, coarsely pitiful. "Don't say that! Don't say it! Have a little pity! My God! don't you know I'm dying? Don't leave me here to die like a dog, in the name of mercy!"

"Dying . . ." Coast repeated, while Katherine bent forward, peering steadily into the man's face. "What d'you mean by 'dying'?"

"Don't you understand—can't you see?" The plump, spotted hands fumbled at his throat; for the first time Coast remarked that it was bandaged, and began to comprehend what frightful fear was bringing the man to his feet. "That damn' dog," Blackstock breathed convulsively—"he's done for me, if I don't get help—medical help—quick. He's torn my throat to tatters," he whispered; "I'm poi-

soned, poisoned! If you leave me here, I'll go mad and die mad—hydrophobia! Good God, have pity!"

He broke down completely for a moment or two, whining and blubbering and wringing his hands. It was plain that he was badly frightened, and not without reason.

Coast glanced at Katherine; she wore a face of doubt mirroring his own perplexity, but when she caught his eye upon her, responded with a nod and a shrug.

"I think we'll have to . . ." he said, tentative.

"Of course," she answered listlessly.

"Look here, Blackstock!" At Coast's sharp and frigid address, the man quieted abruptly, and apparently coming to a realisation of the spectacle he was making of himself, got slowly and shame-facedly to his feet. 'If we agree to take you off the island, you know what it means? I'll turn you over to the police, first place we stop."

"I don't care," Blackstock asserted eagerly. "I don't care a damn. I'll go anywhere, do anything—go to the chair, if I have to—work out my life in the pen—anything but stay here and go mad. I've been a cur, I know, but for the love of God don't leave me to die like one——"

"Hel-lo!" Behind the trio the keel of a rowboat grated on the sand, and Appleyard jumped briskly

ashore, trotting up, painter in hand. "What's this?" he demanded briskly. "Hello, Coast! Madam, your servant. . . Now, *what's* the row?"

He put himself in the centre of the group, bright watchful eyes diagnosing one expression after another on the countenances round him; with something in his pose and manner singularly suggestive of an exceptionally intelligent and inquisitive magpie.

Coast dropped a hand affectionately on his shoulder. "Thank Heaven, you're here at last," he said. "And here's your prisoner—take him in the name of the law and for the sake of peace. He's been badly bitten, first by a dog and then by fright, and he wants to give himself up and be sent to a hospital."

"Oh, that's it, eh? I heard a bit of the confab, while rowing in, and it listened uncommon' interestin'; but I couldn't figure out what was at the bottom of it all. Well, well, Mr. Blackstock!" The little man rubbed his hands. "I am glad to come up with you. This is more fun than a goat, for sure. Come!" He jerked his perky little head toward the tender. "Jump in, and I'll hurry you to market."

A sullen look replaced the terror that had masked Blackstock's face. He sighed and with a brief, uncertain nod, apparently directed at Coast, collected himself and trudged heavily toward the boat, entering which he squatted silently in the stern.

Appleyard's eyes sought Coast's. The younger man lifted his shoulders, disclaiming honour or responsibility. "When the devil was sick," he quoted in disgust, lowering his tone. "Keep an eye on him."

"Wel-l, rawther," Appleyard drawled. "But he won't try any monkeyshines aboard the *Echo*—or I never saw a man afraid of his sins before. . . . Madam," he added, turning with a curious little courtly bow to the woman, "if you'll step in"—his glance travelled past her, down the beach—"we'll beat that pack to the mainland. I see," he said, "they're launching a long-boat. What kind of a yarn explains that, please?"

Coast recounted with exceptional brevity the wrecking of the schooner, at the same time stepping into the boat and placing himself at the oars, on the middle seat. Katherine sat forward, behind him, and Appleyard, pushing off, scrambled aft and dropped down beside Blackstock, who sulkily moved to one side to make room for him.

"Look lively, Mr. Coast," the little man advised pleasantly. "We really haven't got a minute to spare—those chaps are laying to their oars as if they really wanted to scrape acquaintance with us. Or perhaps," he suggested with a look askance at Blackstock, "my cheerful prisoner can account for this apparent mad anxiety of theirs to bid their

dis—, I mean *ex*-tinguished leader a fond farewell."

Blackstock, fumbling nervously at his bandaged throat, made no answer. Coast, bending all his strength to the oars, drove the dory swiftly toward the *Echo*.

"Blackstock," said Appleyard, ironic, "what you got in that neat little bag between your feet? The conventional pyjamas and toothbrush, what?"

The tormented man at his side grumbled something inarticulate.

"Did I understand you to imply it's none of my business? How extraordinarily rude, Mr. Blackstock! Besides being untrue—*quite* a naughty fib. In addition to which it's uncalled for: I *know*."

"You know?" Blackstock turned to him with a scowl.

"Sure. I can put two and a millstone together and make a hole in a ladder just as easy as take a silk purse out of a souse's ear. It wouldn't be you, Mr. Blackstock," Appleyard continued without giving his victim time to analyse this astonishing statement—"it just wouldn't be you if you didn't try to hand your friends the double-cross. That bag's stuffed with loot—the best part of the truck they were running this trip—jewelry, for a dollar. And *that's* why, you see, they're so infatuated with the idea of shaking your hand and wringing your

neck before you get away: they've just discovered your perfidy. But don't you fret. Here we are and long before they can drive that seine-boat this far we'll be sailing merrily away."

With this assurance Appleyard rose, catching the *Echo's* side as Coast shipped his oars and the dory glided smoothly alongside the larger vessel. "Steady on!" he said. "Coast, you first, and give a hand to Mrs. Blackstock. Now, you"—to Blackstock when Coast had helped Katherine into the cockpit—"and step lively! Your companions in crime are a bit too close for comfort. . . . Coast, I'd suggest that Mrs. Blackstock step below until we get under way; there's apt to be a bit of shooting, I'm afraid, if we don't look sharp."

Katherine sought Coast's eyes; he nodded a grave affirmation into hers. "Only a few moments," he said, offering his hand. Without a word she accepted it and let herself down into the dark interior of the cabin.

"Now, Coast, the anchor—lively!"

Coast straightened up hastily. Blackstock was in his way, standing in the corner of the cockpit between the cabin-trunk and the coaming, while Appleyard was hurriedly taking up the engine-pit hatch. So the younger man stepped unsuspectingly to starboard across the centre-board trunk, into the very arms of calamity.

What followed fell like a bolt from the blue and passed with its rapidity.

Appleyard stood to port with his back to Blackstock, in the act of putting the hatch aside. Coast on the seaward side was on the point of lifting himself to the top of the cabin, with intent to go forward and cast off the anchor. There was crossing his mind the veriest hint of a suspicion that the blackness in the shadow of the unfurled canvas, above the cabin, was more dense and tangible than it should be, when this shadow, seemingly with a single movement, rose above him like a cloud, towering as huge and terrifying, its black human bulk blotting out the blazing stars, as the fabled jinnee of the fisherman's bottle: loomed menacingly above him in the enormous, dripping nakedness of Chang, and fell upon him with the fury and ferocity of a panther.

For a few chaotic seconds he remained conscious, feeling himself crushed and borne down irresistably to the deck, then lifted like a bag of grain and hurled directly into the black, gaping maw of the companionway.

Something came in painful contact with his skull, and the world went up in a blaze of crimson flame. . . .

XXI

THROUGH the empty murk of the blasted, blackened world strange ghosts of thoughts, cares, strange blind weeping faces of things that he had known, scurried like mice through the night of an empty house, came out of darkness, passed into darkness, and returned, plucking at him with weak, futile hands, crying importunately for heed and recognition; but when he tried to know them, they were gone, leaving only the ache of effort. . . .

Then suddenly he was conscious, lying at the bottom of a pit of everlasting midnight, his limbs constrained in unnatural positions, his head racked by splitting pains, but singularly, softly pillowed, his face gently bedewed with drops of moisture, soft and warm.

He struggled to rise, stirred, murmured incoherently, and slid back into insensibility.

When again intelligence returned to him, there was light—a strong and yellow glare flooding the cabin of the *Echo* from the lamp rocking in its gimbals overhead. A face bent above his—Katherine's; his head lay in her lap; and another face, Appleyard's, was close beside that fairer one. On both he read anxiety, compassion and solicitude.

"Hello," he said weakly.

"Feeling better?" asked Appleyard.

"Some." Coast essayed a smile, and made a failure of it, then with a sudden return of memory put forth an effort that cost him the agony of feeling a jagged tongue of flame lick through his brain, and sat up. "What's happened?" he asked thickly.

"A little something of everything unpleasant," said Appleyard. "You had a nasty fall and pretty nearly cracked that solid ivory skull of yours. I've had a bit of a shake-up, extremely detrimental to the admirable poise of my nervous system; and Mrs. Blackstock has experienced a shock and a fright that didn't do her any particular amount of good."

"Yes . . . but . . ."

Coast reviewed their position in a comprehensive survey of the cabin. They three were prisoners, huddled together in close captivity; the companion doors were closed and undoubtedly locked—since otherwise Appleyard would long since have had them open; for the air in the cabin was hot and oppressive. Katherine was looking pale and worn, Appleyard bright but distinctly worried. Coast himself was suffering severely from the blow on his head and a broken scalp, which Katherine had bandaged as best she could with two handkerchiefs. In so far, their condition was unpleasant and uncomfortable; external circumstances rendered it distressing and apparently dangerous.

Since his loss of consciousness the breeze had gained in strength to such a degree that there was now a moderately stiff sea running. In the trough of this for the most of the time, the catboat was wallowing crazily, rolling so heavily that she frequently seemed to be on her beam ends, now and again varying this conduct by running free before the wind for a few moments, but only to bring up again broadside to the waves. The motor was silent and there was no sound audible from the cockpit beyond an occasional slap of spray and the rattling of the mainsheet block along its traveller as the boom banged and swayed from port to starboard and back again. Considered as sailing, the existing conditions were pure insanity.

Every instinct of the sailor outraged, Coast tried to stand up and open the doors. The latter, however, resisted his efforts, and the boat presently lurched her lee rubstrake under and threw him on his back; in which position he remained while Appleyard chronicled the futility of his own attempts to break out and narrated what he understood of the happenings which had brought the *Echo* to this pass.

"Blackstock jumped me," he explained—"I had my back turned, you know—just as the Chinaman dropped on you like a load of brick. Before I knew what was up, the brute had me in a hold I couldn't break—both arms pinned. Then he snatched my

gun out of my pocket and threw me after you—t'other side of the centre-board. I lit on my feet, but the doors were slammed and bolted before I could turn round, and it was all over but the shouting. . . . There was plenty of that, for Blackstock wasted a lot of valuable time trying to start the motor before he told Chang to hoist the sail. By then the long-boat was close in and Blackstock warning her to keep off, or he'd shoot. Right then somebody in the boat started something—the bullet lodged in the side, by the sound of it. The long-boat bumped us, and there was the dickens of a shindig going on overhead. I gathered that Chang distinguished himself with the boathook, using it as a flail, and Blackstock must 've had another gun besides mine from the way he kept a-popping. The other gang kept busy, too; but they hadn't the heart for it Blackstock and Chang had, and after a bit they sheered off and gave it up. . . .

“Somehow or other Chang got the sail up, and we began to move. There was some groaning overhead, and then a fall, with Blackstock cussin' moderate, but steady, but we skimmed along as steadily and prettily as your please. That was over an hour ago—say an hour and a half; and ever since then this lunatic business has been going on. I lighted the lamp and attacked the door with a screw-driver—the only crowbar I could find—bent that

out of shape and yelled myself hoarse without any result. My private opinion is that both of 'em were pretty well shot up before they got away, and are now in no shape to go pleasure-boating."

"That sounds reasonable," said Coast, preoccupied. He reviewed the situation briefly, then bent over and with the twisted screw-driver pried up one of the deck planks, which had been left unnailed, though tightly fitted, to facilitate the placing of ballast. In the aperture revealed a number of bricks of lead lay against the centre-board trunk, in a thin wash of bilge water. Coast picked one up, balancing it in his hand while he replaced the plank. The bar of lead was solid and very heavy—of the shape and weight technically known as a "fifty-six."

"Right," commented Appleyard; "that may do the trick. Come over on this side, if you please, Mrs. Blackstock," he added, as Coast rose and facing the door balanced himself as carefully as the scant headroom of the tiny cabin would permit; "if the door should hold by any accident, that thing's liable to bounce back like a rubber-ball, only much more so. You might as well keep out of the way."

When Katherine had quietly complied, Coast, the fifty-six poised near his shoulder, waited until the *Echo* momentarily rode with an even keel, then with all his might sent it crashing against the panels of

the starboard door. They yielded like paper, leaving a ragged hole, through which he thrust an arm, groping for the bolt. This found and drawn, he pushed the door back and ascended, Appleyard following.

To his immense astonishment, both sky and sea were stark and bright with moonlight. So long it seemed since that fourth night back, when he had seen Appleyard thrown overboard from the smuggling schooner! So long those days and nights, so thickly thronged with emotions and events, that it seemed almost incredible that this could be the same moon, only ninety-six hours the older! He stared agape marvelling to think that it now shone down upon the final chapter of what Appleyard was pleased to term his Romance. . . .

Behind him he heard the little man's quiet and courteous voice: "Better not come up just yet, Mrs. Blackstock. A little later. . . ."

The woman answered, her accents indistinctly acquiescent. Gently shutting the broken door, Appleyard relieved himself of a low-toned exclamation of immense awe and wonderment.

At their feet, blocking the cockpit with his huge body and long, massively proportioned limbs, Chang lay supine and inert, half across the engine-pit, into which one limp arm dangled. What time the shadow of the sail and swinging boom did not blot

it out in inky blackness, the moonlight struck cold and hard upon the evil, grinning mask of death that was his face.

Swaying drunkenly, Blackstock occupied the wheel-box, his fat white hands loose of grasp upon the spokes and moved by rather than controlling it. His head sagged low upon his chest, swinging heavily from side to side as the catboat rolled.

He, at least, could not be dead, as Chang unquestionably was—a fact Appleyard presently verified by the most brief of inquests, discovering in the Chinaman's naked torso no less than three bullet wounds, all indicating the perforation of a vital spot.

Stooping low to escape the banging of the boom, Coast stepped over the Chinaman's body and went to Blackstock. He had some trouble overcoming his physical repugnance to the task, but resolutely forced himself to touch the man, seizing a shoulder with one hand, while with the other he lifted his head and exposed his face to the light. It shone a ghastly white, but the jaws were set and in their sockets the prominent eyes moved and lifted to Coast's face, with a dim, pale glimmer of recognition. But it was evident at a glance that only his tremendous vitality and force of will sustained the man: the blood soaked bosom of his flannel shirt told too plainly the tale of a terrible drain upon his strength.

"Appleyard——"

"No; this one first—he's done for completely," interrupted the little man with prompt decision; "we've got to get him out of the way before we can move. T'other can wait."

"But he'll die——"

"I'm satisfied. Here, lend me a lift at this, won't you?"

Together, with considerable difficulty, they managed to raise the body of Chang to a side seat and then over the rail. A sullen splash and a shower of spray, molten silver in the moonlight, were all his funeral rite. . . .

"And now for the quick," said Appleyard; "and quick's the word."

But as they approached Blackstock the man, drawing upon some unsuspected reserve of nervous force, deliberately if with torturing effort, pulled himself together, lifted a leg over the wheel and slipped off the box to the seat to leeward. A grim ghost of a smile showed upon his face, and for a fugitive instant there shone from his eyes a gleam of their one-time mocking lustre, a little proud and disdainful, altogether unrepentant. Then, with a long sigh, his chin dropped down on his breast again.

"Thanks," said Appleyard callously; "you've saved us a deal of trouble and exertion, I'm sure. Coast, take the wheel, will you, while I get Mr.

Blackstock a drink and see what can be done to save his worthless hide for a more evil end."

Obediently Coast placed himself on the box. "Any idea where we are?" he asked.

Blackstock roused at the query and raised his head, staring round the horizon. "Vineyard Sound," he croaked hoarsely, with a nod to leeward; where, against the pale blue splendour of the sky the twin red masthead beacons of the light vessel watched them, several miles abeam.

Coast consulted Appleyard's face. "New Bedford?" he asked tersely.

The little man nodded. "Best for all concerned," he added; "especially if this festive hydrophobic is to get proper attendance."

With a snort of disgust he moved to Coast's side, and trimmed the sheet, as the latter swung the *Echo* off upon her course; then turned and went forward to the companion door, descending to the cabin.

Thereafter for a little Coast heard indistinctly the murmur of Appleyard's voice, civil and pleasant but firm, contending with Katherine's. He understood that she was arguing against her own wishes and natural instincts, insisting she must go to her husband's aid, while the little man was insistently refusing to permit anything of the sort. And confirmation of this deduction was furnished when the de-



“Too late he said, that’s all, good night”

pective's small, blonde-thatched head appeared against the light.

"Don't you worry, madam," he was saying in conclusion. "Leave him to me; I'm an old hand at first aid to the injured, and I can do for him infinitely more than you'd dare attempt. If there's the slightest need of you, I'll be the first to let you know."

He wagged his head obstinately and came on deck, grumbling privately some refreshing personal opinion as to the general and perverse intractability of the feminine sex.

Balancing himself before Blackstock, who in the interim had sunk into a semblance of lethargy, he measured out a good half-glass of brandy to an equal amount of water, tucked the bottle, securely corked, beneath his arm, and roused the wounded man with a touch as gentle and considerate as his attitude and words were rough. "Here," he said; "get this down, and we'll make an examination, Blackstock."

Appleyard holding the glass to his lips, Blackstock drank greedily. "Thanks," he muttered huskily as the little man took away the glass drained to the final drop.

"Don't thank me—'t isn't my brandy. If it was, I doubt I'd give you any." He moved off and placed the bottle and the glass in a corner, where they were

in no danger of overturning, now that a trained and steady hand was at the helm and the *Echo* moving smoothly and easily to a leading wind. "Now, harf a mo'," he continued. "I'm going to get this motor going"—and with this he dropped into the open engine-pit—"and then I'll have a look at your wounds." He bent over and began to rock the fly-wheel.

Slowly the warming spirit worked a change in Blackstock, lending him a fictitious and evanescent sense of strength. He straightened up against the back of the seat, a faint touch of colour dyeing his cheeks, and with a peculiar half-smile watched the little man at work.

"What's the use?" he asked abruptly in a voice more clear than heretofore.

"What's the use of what?" asked Appleyard sharply, looking up.

"Of troubling with me—trying to save my life?"

"Oh . . ." With a sudden cough the motor began to hum; Appleyard sat down on the edge of the hatch coaming, folded his hands before him and continued to eye the wounded man. "I don't know," he said with an air of open confession: "I don't know, I'm sure. Business, so far as I'm concerned; commonplace humanity with Coast, I presume; all that sort of nonsense. Why? Don't you want to be helped—saved?"

Soberly Blackstock shook his heavy head. "No,"

he said evenly. "What's the use? I'm at the end of my tether, as far as getting any of the savour out of life's concerned. . . . Can't see the profit of clinging to what's going to be only a burden to me from now on. . . . Prefer to be let alone. . . ."

He swung his head as though it were lead, to bring his gaze to rest on Coast; for a full minute he eyed him steadily, wonderingly; then with a little nod he moistened his lips with his tongue. "Besides," he said, with more perceptible strain, "I'm only in the way. With me out of it, everything 'll run more smoothly for all of you." . . .

By a mysteriously reinforced effort he lifted himself suddenly to his feet and stood swaying while Appleyard from his low seat and Coast from his post of duty watched him in amazement.

"Repentance?" said the man slowly, as if iterating some recently spoken word. He laughed briefly and without mirth. "No; nothing like that. I'm not that sort . . . which you can't understand. . . . No; I'm just a bad loser, that's all. I've played the game I liked—which you can't understand, either, for you played on the other side—and I've lost out. . . . It's over . . . over and paid for . . . as much as I intend ever to pay. . . ." He smiled again his curious, secret smile. . . . "That's all. . . . Obituary: Here lies a bad loser. R. I. P. . . . Gentlemen" He leaned heavily on the

coaming. "Kindly convey respects to wife—and regrets. . . ."

With an exclamation of awakening comprehension Appleyard tried suddenly to lift himself out of the engine-pit. Blackstock smiled strangely and pityingly down at him.

"Too late," he said. . . . "That's all. G'd-night . . ."

Before Coast had grasped an inkling of his purpose the man, placing a foot upon the seat, put forth his final ounce of strength and plunged over the side.

Coast put the wheel down hard and swung the *Echo* up into the wind. A glance at their wake showed him a spot of yeasty, churning water, silver upon the black.

As the boat came up he would have leaped from his place, but Appleyard was too quick for him.

The hand of the little man struck flat against his chest and thrust him back upon the box. Simultaneously Appleyard seized the wheel and sent the spokes spinning round to leeward. With a jerk the boom shot off and the mainsheet tautened.

"No!" cried Appleyard, his small, wizened face singularly white and solemn in the moonlight. "No, let him go—let him go the way he wants to go, I tell you—to whatever God he owns, with this, at least this one decent act to plead for mercy on his soul!"

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Vance, Louis Joseph
No Man's Land

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